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***The Forgotten Emotion:***  
**An Interpretative Phenomenological**  
**Analysis into the Lived Experience of**  
**Anger in Young Men.**

**Submitted to the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and Middlesex  
University Psychology Department in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Existential Counselling and Psychotherapy.**

**© Thomas Henry Barber**

**June 2016, London, United Kingdom**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation explores the lived experience of problematic anger in young men.

Qualitative phenomenological research was conducted using semi-structured interviews with a sample of six male participants between the ages of 20-25 years. The accounts were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and three main themes were identified. Theme one explores how anger initially stirs within the participants, impacting their sense of agency and their bodily feelings and sensations. Theme two illuminates how anger impacts the participant's changing self-concept, a loss of awareness and control, and the issue of responsibility for actions taken. Theme three highlights how the participants attempt to regain control of themselves and return to a state of calm and composure. The study seeks to contribute to the paucity of research into the lived-experience of anger in young men. Findings suggest that anger is an intensely dynamic experience that unfolds with an increasing impact on young men's ability to retain control over their sense of self as experienced in time, space, in their bodies and inter-relationally. The study recommends that continued research be undertaken into anger through the lens of these four areas, often referred to as the 'existentials'.

## **Keywords**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, IPA, Existential Phenomenology, Anger, Men.

## **Statement of authorship**

This dissertation is written by Thomas Henry Barber and has ethical clearance from the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University for the Degree of Doctor of Existential Counselling and Psychotherapy. The author reports no conflict of interest, and alone is responsible for the content and writing of the dissertation.

## **Anonymisation and transcript conventions**

The transcripts presented in this study were edited in order to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. Participants' descriptions of their experiences occasionally include the use of profanity, which have been left intact as an accurate representation of the idiographic content.

### **Transcript notation**

...	significant pause
[ ]	material omitted
[laughs]	additional material or my summary

<b>Word count</b>	<b>50,035</b>
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## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

The aim of this research is to explore the lived experience of problematic anger in young men from a phenomenological and existentialist perspective. It seeks to provide insights into what it is that angers young men, how anger affects them psychologically, emotionally and physiologically, and what they do when experiencing and struggling with the emotion of anger.

In my own therapeutic practice, I have encountered numerous clients suffering the effects of anger, whether their own or that of others. But what prompted me to undertake this research was the anger I myself experienced when the 21-year-old son of an old school friend was stabbed to death in a street fight during an angry altercation. Around the same time, another young man was stabbed to death on one of London's busiest shopping streets and yet another was shot dead in Birmingham, victim of a gang 'war' fuelled by angry retribution. In the weeks that followed, reprisal attacks occurred, leading to the death of yet another young man. These cases represent just a small sample of similar incidents reported in the British national press on an ongoing basis.

In the aftermath of the collapse of the financial world that occurred around the same time, I watched an outpouring of anger erupt across the world. This was directed at governments, the banking sector, politicians and whoever else was deemed 'responsible' for the ensuing economic hardships. When riots broke out in London, then spread to other parts of the UK, the media was able to report almost in-time occurrences of angry attacks and violence due to these incidents being captured on social media. This unprecedented degree of mass, 'minute-by-minute' reporting brought the human phenomenon of anger to the forefront of social awareness. Many of the images broadcast showed young men engaging in acts of violence

and vandalism; Ministry of Justice figures suggested that 90 per cent of those arrested in the riots were indeed young and male (Travis, 2011).

Anger has been found to be fundamentally linked to our representations of personal and societal disorder (Potegal and Novaco, 2010). Indeed, complaints from parts of the affected communities in England where rioting took place pointed to a sense of breakdown in society, contributing to a backlash of anger at the police. The new level of access to world reporting provided by social media also had an impact in the Middle East and North Africa, where the onset of the Arab Spring triggered civil uprisings. Widely reported incidents revealed the anger expressed by people confronting disrespect, repression, injustice and threats to their autonomy or future hopes (Potegal & Stemmler, 2010).

It seems that whenever such incidents occur there is surprise and dismay at the ferocity with which anger is expressed. People, it seems, never get accustomed to anger or its effects.

Intrigued by this, I determined to find out more about what the emotion of anger was like for young men. I found myself formulating questions. What happens in the moment of anger that causes such phenomena as ‘blackouts’ and ‘tunnel vision’? What happens in the experience of anger that makes it possible for young men to engage in angry altercations with such ferocity?

Whilst such questions suggest we already know what people are capable of when they become angry, the actual lived experience of anger itself remains largely unexplored, particularly in the case of young men. The link between anger and aggression has itself been extensively researched (Zelin et al, 1972; Averill, 1982; Berkowitz, 1993; Eatough et al, 2008), and ‘aggression’ is often equated with anger, along with hostility, irritability, hate and

rage. However, the starting point of this study does not lie in *acts* of anger but rather in the *experience* of anger. The key questions asked are: how is anger lived within the world of young men? And how can this lived world be elucidated in a way that “expands our understanding of human being and human experience” (Dahlberg et al, 2008, p.37)?

From a societal perspective anger affects many people. A survey on anger by the Mental Health Foundation (Mental Health Foundation, 2008) found a majority (64 per cent) of respondents agreeing with the view that people in general were getting angrier. While 32 per cent of respondents knew someone within their family or close circle of friends with a problem controlling their anger, 58 per cent acknowledging not knowing where to find help for their own angry feelings. As the MHF’s chief executive, Dr Andrew McCulloch, commented when the report was published, anger was the ‘elephant in the room’ as far as mental health was concerned:

In a society where people can get help for depression and anxiety, panic, phobia, eating disorders and a range of other psychological and emotional problems, it seems extraordinary that we are left to fend for ourselves when it comes to an emotion as powerful as anger (cited by Nutkins, 2008).

Indeed, this is an echo of an earlier conclusion by DiGiuseppe et al (1994, p.3)

Anger is the forgotten emotion. There seems to be agreement among mental health professionals that violence is prevalent in the United States, and many researchers, clinicians, and political leaders focus on the problem of violent behavior. However, little is heard about the emotion that frequently precedes such behavior – anger.

The potentially devastating effects of anger were further highlighted in a YouGov survey (YouGov, 2000) of 2,000 people, which found 12 per cent of respondents admitting they had trouble controlling their anger. This underlines the need for greater understanding of what actually happens in this most powerful of emotional states.

Thomas' (2003) US-based exploration of men's anger suggests that there is more to anger in men than simple gender role socialisation. Issues such as truth, fairness, sportsmanship, professionalism and an overall sense of right versus wrong enter into the mix, as does the concept of 'control' (in the double sense of being controlled and of maintaining control). However, Thomas' study focuses on the exploration of the 'meaning' of anger, as opposed to the actual lived experience of the 'moment' of anger. As I pondered this, it struck me that a more thorough-going exploration of the lived experience of anger required a phenomenological method of investigation.

Phenomenological research looks to provide understanding of, and insights into, the less tangible meanings and complexities of our world (Finlay, 2011). Van Manen (2000) describes the phenomenological quest as one which adopts "a certain attentive awareness to the things of the world as we live them rather than as we conceptualize or theorize them" (p.460). Finlay (2011, p.3) describes how phenomenology gives us the opportunity to explore a person's world by inviting us "to slow down, focus on, and dwell with the 'phenomenon'".

This research aims to explore what happens during young men's lived experience of anger "in all its richness, complexity and vitality" (Langdridge, 2007, p.6). It seeks to shed light on how and why young men come to be angry, what happens when they lose control in what Fessler (2010, p.368) calls the "male flash of anger", and what they do to eventually regain control. This requires getting as close as possible to the essence of their lived world in order to explore their meaning-making of these experiences and make explicit the 'what it is like' of this human experience.

This study uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the anger experiences of a relatively homogenous group of young men, aged 20-25 years, all in fulltime employment and resident in eastern England at the time of the research. The sample was partially recruited through anger management groups to which men had self-referred. The decision to restrict the sample to young men was based on my own experience, which suggested that this age cohort of men had particular problems managing their anger. As a young man, I had struggled with anger issues of my own, and had felt curious at the time about what was happening within me. It bears emphasis that the focus of the current study is not on the management of anger but on understanding the phenomenon itself.

In the next chapter (chapter 2), I provide a review of the existing literature on anger, including its basis as an emotion and the various definitions given to it. Following a historical account of anger, I explore different psychological theoretical perspectives as well as sociological perspectives on anger relating to gender, class and age. The review then moves into an exploration of existential phenomenological perspectives on anger, before reviewing existing research relevant to the current study.

In Chapter 3, I outline my epistemological position in the research, including my reasons for choosing a qualitative research methodology as opposed to a quantitative one. I also present my rationale for choosing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as my research methodology.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed account of the method employed to gather and analyse the data.

In Chapter 5, I present the analysis of the data from the research interviews. After presenting idiographic portraits of the six participants, I outline the superordinate themes and subthemes that emerged from my analysis of their narratives. This provides an opportunity for readers to engage in a triple hermeneutic process (making meaning of my meaning-making of the participant's meaning-making) so as to come to their own meanings as to what emerged out of the data.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the findings and how they relate to the extant literature. I critically examine the extent to which the findings are congruent, or at odds, with the current literature, and highlight how the findings add to existing knowledge. I then explore the significance of the findings and their implications for professional therapeutic practice. This is followed by a critical evaluation of the methodology and method used in this study. The discussion chapter ends with recommendations for future research into the experience of anger and the lived world of young men.

I conclude with an overview of the study's findings, specifically in terms of the original aims of the research as set out in this introductory chapter.

In keeping with IPA's commitment to hermeneutic reflection, and in line with quality evaluation criteria set out for qualitative research (Smith et al, 2009), I include a section at the end of Chapters 2 to 6 addressing my reflexive process during each significant stage of the study. This offers readers a transparent account of my engagement with the process, and may lead the reader further into the essence of the triple hermeneutic.



## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

A review of the academic literature exploring emotion reveals a plethora of research into the understanding of ‘anger’. This literature review begins by exploring emotion, the foundation of anger. It then looks at the complex definitions of anger now available, followed by an exploration of how understandings and perspectives on anger have developed historically. I then explore research on anger emanating from three different perspectives: psychological, sociological and existential phenomenological. Finally I take a detailed look at current research on anger, including qualitative research projects of particular relevance to the current study, and on this basis justify the need for the current research.

It should be noted that the literature included in this review, while not exhaustive, is representative of the major currents in emotion and anger theory and research.

### **2.1 Emotion**

The nature of emotion has been studied and debated throughout history, with attention focussing on two basic questions: what an emotion is (Averill, 1982), and what role it plays in our lives (Reddy, 2001; Oatley, 2004; Potegal and Novaco, 2010; Frevert, 2011; Gross, 2012).

Aristotle (350/1931) argued that emotions needed to be suppressed in order for humans to avoid experiencing the dangers associated with them. Since his day, much effort has been invested in how to repress and control emotions. William James (1890), researching the ‘classic works’ of emotion, noted the absence of any one point of view or generative principle but described emotion as the feeling of bodily changes following the perception of an event.

According to Averill (1982, p.3) most psychologists have historically looked to simplify 'emotion', avoiding the examination of specific emotional phenomena such as anger, fear, joy and the other numerous emotions we experience in everyday life.

Most traditional theories have separated emotions into components, such as physiological states, cognitive processes, and behavioural expressions. This 'splitting' has been apparent since Descartes' (1649/1989) designation of emotions as something distinct from rationality. Theories have focussed on biological analysis rather than exploring the subjective elements of the experience (Averill, 1982). In general, the way in which emotions have been theorised and researched has involved a tussle between exploring the expression of emotions, looking at how to control them, and seeking to classify them.

Strasser (cited in Lazarus, 1991, p.24) describes the attempt at precise categorisation of emotions as difficult "not because of the complex nature of emotions but also because each emotion is usually attached, linking, and interacting with other emotions." How emotion is experienced is also dependant on the circumstances. In relation to anger, for example, Strasser suggests that jealous, envious, hostile, bitter, hateful, and vindictive emotions can all be potentially experienced.

Experiencing emotion is a fundamental aspect of what it is to be human, keeping us away from danger while moving us closer to fulfilment, meaning and happiness in life (Izard et al, 1984). Fox (2008, p.xv) argues that emotions "are at the heart of what it is to be human. Indeed emotions are at the heart of what it is to be alive." However, emotion doesn't always translate to a consciously aware experience and therefore is not necessarily *felt*. As Burton (2015, p.3) notes, "an emotion, being in some sense latent, can only ever be felt ... through

the emotional experiences that it gives rise to.” What distinguishes an emotion from a ‘feeling’ appears to involve a complex, often confusing mixture of cognitions, moods, bodily experiences, and phenomenological and existential influences on our being-in-the-world (Ratcliffe, 2008). The most *meaning*-driven aspect of our emotions therefore can be found in the *experience* of our feelings, which appear more present in our lived, aware experiencing than do our emotions; feelings present as our physiological, cognitive and behavioural responses to the stimulus of our emotions (Fox, 2008). It is how something ‘feels’ to us that is important in connecting to the lived experience: the whole of a person’s experiencing of emotion as a complex, embodied part of our physiological functioning (Fox, 2008, p.3). Solomon (2007, p.3) sums up this all-encompassing, pervasive phenomenon succinctly in the phrase: “We are our emotions.”

Sartre (1939/1962) describes emotion as an unreflective state which, the moment it is experienced, no longer exists as an emotion. Sartre opens his monograph, *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, with a critique of William James’ ‘peripheric theory’ of the emotions: the view that emotions are “nothing but the consciousness *of* physiological manifestations” (1939/1962, p.33). Arguing that this theory cannot account for the meaningful and purposive nature of emotions, Sartre puts forward the idea of emotions as substitutes for a magical or symbolic way of relating to the world, occurring when problem-solving behaviour is for some reason perceived to be “impossible.” Referring to the work of French art visionary Paul Guillaume, he notes how the latter arrives at “a functional conception of anger” by observing how the angry *act* enables an escape from the *experiencing* of anger: “an abrupt solution of a conflict, a way of cutting the Gordian knot” (Sartre, 1939/1962, pp.36-37). Sartre shows how emotion can in a sense be affected by changes in experiencing (Lambie and Marcel, 2002). The movement from emotion to action that Sartre describes highlights the interplay between

emotion and feeling and the desire to define and position emotion so as to examine its function.

## **2.2 Towards a definition of anger**

Anger has been described as the “forgotten emotion” (DiGiuseppe, Tafrate, and Eckhardt, 1994, p.3). Historically, anger definitions have been somewhat fractured and lacking in cohesive characterisation. They have often pointed to a singular part of the human experience (or a theoretical explanation) as a way of explaining anger (Novaco, 1974; Ellis, 1977; Rubin, 1986; Lazarus, 1991). As Wranick and Scherer (2010, p.244) point out, “anger as an emotion tends to be narrowly defined and poorly understood.” In a similar vein, Rothenberg (1971, p.86) notes that

Almost invariably, anger has not been considered an independent topic worthy of investigation ... [which] has not only deprived anger of its rightful importance in the understanding of human behavior, but has also led to a morass of confused definitions, misconceptions, and simplistic theories.

Perhaps as a result of the lack of a clear definition of anger, research into it as a specific emotion, has in part been combined with what is seemingly deemed as more pressing areas of research and treatment, such as anxiety and depression. However, on the basis of a search of the *Psychoinfo* database, DiGiuseppe and Tafrate (2007) reveal that between 1971 and 2005, only seven out of a possible 1267 articles covering anxiety and depression were related to anger, with three of those appearing after 2001. They ascribe this largely to complications in defining the difference between anger and other interchangeable descriptions, noting that “the words anger, aggression, hostility, irritability, and hate are used interchangeably in our field” (2007, p.18).

Adding to this is the still commonly held view that anger is a secondary emotion, related in part to depression (Hunter and Macalpine, 1963) and interrelated with other emotions such as anxiety, shame and guilt (Watson and Clark, 1984). Berkowitz (1993) summarises the lack of definitive understandings thus: “Any really close and thorough examination of the psychological research into the origins of anger ... presents us with occasional inconsistencies and unexpected findings that most of the investigators seem not to have noticed” (p.35).

Nevertheless, the explosive nature of anger (even if felt and experienced passively) has resulted in persistent attempts to encapsulate it. If we are to study it and understand it, we must first define it. De Zulueta (1993) explores the lack of clarification and confusion of definitions from a semantic point of view, observing that “Many authors slip from one to the other without attempting to define their terms or the difference between them” (p.28). This has led to a compendium of descriptions of anger, ranging from a simple sentence, such as "a negatively toned emotion, subjectively experienced as an aroused state of antagonism toward someone or something perceived to be a source of an aversive event" (Novaco, 1994, p.330) to more elaborate and descriptive explanations. DiGiuseppe and Tafrate (2007), for example, define anger in terms of psychobiology, cognition, response mechanism, perception of meaning, and communication:

Anger is a subjectively experienced emotional state with high sympathetic autonomic arousal. It is initially elicited by a perception of a threat ... is associated with evaluative cognitions that emphasise the misdeeds of others and motivate a response of antagonism ... is communicated through facial or postural gestures or vocal inflections, aversive verbalisations, and aggressive behaviour (DiGiuseppe and Tafrate, 2007, p.21).

In Ax's (1953) classic study that explores the physiology of anger, anger is defined as an epinephrine-norepinephrine interaction. In a moment of anger we can enter the flight or fight

response, where we run or stand and fight. Or we can freeze, the body seemingly becoming a 'no-thing' in order to limit the experiencing of what is happening.

From a cognitive perspective it is difficult to encapsulate the complexities surrounding the anger experience. Kassinove (1995) describes anger as a label given to a collection of associated cognitions, such as thoughts, beliefs and images, in relation to certain uncomfortable experiences which are felt in conscious awareness and communicated through various verbal and bodily reactions. These cognitions are liable to change over time, according to societal factors and psychological development, so that what results in somebody feeling angry from a cognitive perspective is ever-changing, contextually driven, and affected by how it is internally appraised and interpreted (Ellsworth and Scherer, 2003; Hall, 2009).

In Kennedy's (1992) definition we get a little closer to the behavioural experience of anger:

Anger is an affective state experienced as the motivation to act in ways that warn, intimidate, or attack those who are perceived as challenging or threatening. Anger is coupled to, and is inseparable from, a sensitivity to the perception of challenges or a heightened awareness of threats (irritability). This affective motivation and sensitivity can be experienced even if no external action occurs (p.150).

Aware of the difficulties of defining anger, Kassinove and Sukhodolsky (1995) offer a multidimensional perspective:

Anger refers to a label given to a constellation of specific uncomfortable subjective experiences and associated cognitions (e.g., thoughts, beliefs, images) that have variously associated verbal, facial, bodily, and autonomic reactions. It is a transient state, in that it eventually passes, and it is a social role, in that our culture or subculture allows for the display of certain kinds of behaviors associated with the internal experience but punishes others. Thus, anger is felt in people's conscious awareness and is communicated through verbalizations and bodily reactions (p.11).

This multidimensional definition has been echoed by other psychologists (Averill, 1982, 1983; Berkowitz, 1993; Eckhardt and Deffenbacher, 1995; Tafrate, Kassinove, and Dundin,

2002), all of whom highlight the interrelatedness of cognitive, phenomenological and behavioural contexts.

DiGiuseppe and Tafrate (2007, p.21) offer an additional perspective by moving beyond the personal experience of anger to explore its links to an individual's sociological status:

It [anger] is initially elicited by a perception of a threat (to one's physical well-being, property, present or future resources, self-image, social status or projected image to one's group, maintenance of social rules that regulate daily life, or comfort) ...

DiGiuseppe and Tafrate (2007) view anger as a phenomenon influenced by behavioural reactions, degrees of physiological reactivity and subjective reflection. This is in line with earlier definitions by Spielberger (1988) and Spielberger et al (1983), who defined anger as a phenomenological construct made up of emotions, feelings, and the autonomic nervous system.

Of the various definitions set out above, the one provided by Kassirer and Sukhodolsky (1995) perhaps brings us closest to the phenomenology of anger, the lens through which this study examines the experience of anger. Their definition, with its inclusion of contextually driven experiences, accords with my own view of anger as a phenomenologically lived experience, and will guide the content and analysis presented in the current study.

## **2.3 Historical perspectives on anger**

Hall (2009, p.10) observes that “anger and rage difficulties are endemic in British and American Society.” However, anger is far from being a recent subject of investigation in society: we find it being written about and alluded to by Aristotle, Seneca, and Plutarch, among others (Potegal and Novaco, 2010). Across history, anger has been seen as a passionate, destructive emotion, the expression of which requires controlling and curtailing.

Civilizations across the world have sought ways to manage the experience of anger (Ekman, 1984; Izard, 1977; Johnson-Laird and Oats, 1989; Kemper, 1987; Tomkins, 1962).

In exploring anger (or *orgē*) and its emotional and behavioural consequences, Aristotle (1939) described it as “a desire, commingled with pain, to see someone punished, and which is provoked by an apparent slight to the angered person, or to something or someone that belongs to him, when that slight is not justified” (cited in Allen, 2003, p.79). Indeed, DiGiuseppe and Tafrate (2007, p.6) argue that Aristotle, by associating emotion with behaviour, “may have been the first to suggest anger management.”

Seneca (345/1958) on the other hand saw anger not purely as an emotion but as a disorder with a destructive nature:

We are here to encounter the most outrageous, brutal, dangerous, and intractable of all passions; the most loathsome and unmannerly; nay, the most ridiculous too; and the subduing of this monster will do a great deal toward the establishment of human peace (cited by DiGiuseppe and Tafrate, 2007, p.4).

Whilst Plutarch concluded that "the only music heard from the house of an angry man is wailing" (45/2004, p.159).

Similar views about the need to control anger, along with condemnations of its unrestrained displays, were expressed by writers during the later Roman Empire and throughout the middle ages (Kemp and Strongman, 1995).

In more recent times, the work of Stearns and Stearns (1985) and Stearns (1992, 1993) provides a comprehensive historical account of emotion in general, and anger in particular, during modern times. This research highlights such areas as gender differences within anger



expression, the role of anger in business and politics, and changing attitudes to anger in the twentieth century.

In general, across history anger has tended to be viewed as a 'passion' rife with danger to sanity, rationality, good judgement, and physiological and social stability (Potegal and Novaco, 2010). Thus attention has focussed on its control and management (Kemp & Strongman, 1995), to the detriment of any deeper investigation of its role as a meaning-driven aspect of human existence.

However, the rise of the medical model and of psychology has encouraged the study of anger as an emotion, allowing connections to be made between aspects of human existence and explanations to be offered of physiological and psychological associative conditions (Williams, 2010). Neurological dimensions of anger have been explored (Potegal and Stemmler, 2010; Harmon-Jones et al, 2010), and a body of work has emerged on the sociology of anger (Schieman, 1999, 2010). Explorations of anger in terms of emotion, feeling and mood have also highlighted the role that anger plays in our existential and phenomenological lived experience (Hillman, 1960; Goldie, 2000; Solomon, 2007; Damasio, 2000, 2006; Stern, 2010; Ratcliffe, 2008, 2012).

While the understanding of anger, and the concepts surrounding it, appear little changed since the days of Aristotle, more attention is now being paid to the ramifications of anger suppression, both physiologically and psychologically. The multifaceted impact of anger, and the complexities surrounding its management and control, from both a personal and a societal perspective (Kemp and Strongman, 1995) highlight the need for a more closely focused examination of its place within our phenomenological world.

## 2.4 Psychological perspectives on anger

### 2.4.1 Psychoanalytical perspectives

On the subject of anger, Freud's main focus was on containing and regulating violent anger (O'Neill, 2010). To the extent that Freud engaged with the concept of anger, he linked it with frustrated libido. As Diamond (1996, p.158) notes,

Freud felt that frustrated sexual instinct – libido – leads to anger, which, instead of being consciously expressed toward the frustrating object, is unconsciously turned inward against one's self, in the form of self-hatred, neurotic guilt, and a severely punitive "super ego".

Similarly, aggression, for Freud, was "a fundamental instinctual drive, consisting of intense angry feelings that motivated aggressive behaviour" (Potegal et al, 2010, p.404). In his 1917 work, *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud explored the psychodynamic view that depression is anger turned inwards. Specifically, he described anger turned inwards at external forces (e.g., a mother). In his opinion, the only way to get rid of depression would be to express anger against the actual external force itself. This view is supported by O'Neill (2010), in which managing anger leads to "the containment of the drive of aggressivity (and anger, its emotional representative) by guilt, the quintessential Freudian emotion" (p.74).

Hitschmann (1947), an early follower of Freud, commented on the reluctance of Freud and other prominent psychologists to explore the "dark and dangerous side of the human psyche" (Diamond, 1996, p.143). Diamond sees a persisting reluctance in psychopathology to step into the world of repressed anger: "For the most part, we wish it would magically disappear, without our having to hear, see, or speak of it" (Diamond, 1996, p.144).

Jung (1991) also contributed to knowledge of the psyche by illuminating the 'shadow' as the face of 'instinct' drives that humans attempt to repress or escape. From a modern day perspective, the shadow might be expressed in linguistic terms such as "I don't know what

came over me”, or “That’s my dark side”: phrases heard so often in the aftermath of incidents such as ‘road rage’. However, as Diamond (1996, p.145) notes, Jung did not apparently “deem it necessary to speak directly to the role of repressed anger and rage in mental disorders.”

#### **2.4.2 Cognitive Behavioural perspectives**

Beginning in the 1920s, ‘projective methods’ were used to explore the experience of internal conflicts and hidden emotions such as anger. Both the Rorschach (1921) Ink Blot Tests and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) (Murray, 1943) sought to elicit emotions that were projected into the tests. However, the tests proved time-consuming, open to subjective interpretation, and lacking in reliability (Lilienfeld et al, 2000; Jenkins, 2008). Other methods, such as picture association, the multidimensional anger inventory, and self-report questionnaires, were developed to assess hostility and aggression (Rosenzweig, 1945; Siegel, 1956; Schultz, 1954; Buss and Durkee, 1957); angry reactions and feelings (Novaco, 1974); and the expression of anger (Zelin, Adler and Myerson, 1972).

Following Funkenstein et al’s (1954) first empirical differentiation of anger styles (for example, anger-in versus anger-out), such research into the experience of anger brought about new methods of assessment and measurement in relation to what became known as ‘state anger and trait anger’. State anger was defined as a temporary emotional state, while trait anger was viewed as a general tendency to react angrily to perceived situations (Spielberger et al, 1988). Individuals more predisposed to feelings of frustration, annoyance and irritation (trait) were found to react more to incidents of state anger, where their anger was exacerbated and experienced above its normal level. Spielberger (1988) developed a State Trait Anger

Expression Inventory (STAXI), derived from his earlier work on assessing anxiety (Spielberger, 1966).

Subsequent research into anger and its treatment from the standpoint of cognitive and behavioural theory explores how someone interprets an experience, how anger is recognised, expressed and controlled and how there are errors in communication with others. This includes Novaco's (1975) adaptation of Meichenbaum's (1975) stress inoculation training (SIT), which was initially developed for the treatment of anxiety (Beck and Fernandez, 1998). Clinical psychological interest in anger is clearly evident in the work of Beck (1999), Howells and Day (2003), Kassirer (1995), Taylor (2002) and Taylor et al (2005).

Tafrate's (1995) review of anger management research, in which he conducted an analysis of the effectiveness of various cognitive, relaxation based, and skills training therapies, as well as exposure based, cathartic and multicomponent treatments, found that "Strategies that target self-statements, physiological arousal, and behavioural skills all appear to be effective" (p.128). However, the study was criticised by Beck and Fernandez (1998) for its limited inclusion criteria, low number of studies, sample limitations, lack of clinical samples, use of unpublished results, sampling bias, and validity issues. Beck and Fernandez (1998) conducted a meta-analysis of 50 cognitive behavioural research studies on anger carried out between 1970 and 1975. Their results, which substantiated the effectiveness of CBT in achieving desired treatment goals, concur with those of other meta-analyses (Bowman-Edmondson and Cohen-Conger, 1996; DiGiuseppe and Tafrate, 2007).

The cognitive activity and processes that occur in anger have been written about from various scientific and clinical perspectives, leading to hypotheses suggesting that anger is relative to a

person's interpretation of an event (Ellis, 1973; Beck, 1976; Lazarus, 1991; Schachter and Singer, 1962). This interpretation is entwined with the meaning-making found within a constructivist perspective, which in turn is informed by a number of factors such as social and cultural influences. This leads us to consider how much can be known about anger by examining an individual's cognitive process alone and to what extent is it possible to view anger through a purely behavioural lens? Kassino (1995) argues that "anger is a socially constructed experience" (p.21). He notes that Ellis (1962, 1973) and Beck (1976), both hugely influential in the early development of the cognitive and behavioural movements, proposed methods that were in fact constructivist forms of psychological intervention, addressing the whole of the human experience of anger, not solely cognitions or behaviour.

However, this approach focuses on helping people manage their angry behaviour, whereas more recently, Fisher (2005) has proposed a 'popular' approach to 'beating' anger, supporting the persistently held view that anger is something to be 'overcome' or 'overpowered'. Fisher provides much information aimed at helping his audience understand and address anger, including 'Eight Golden Rules of Anger Management' (2005, p.219). Further 'step-by-step' approaches have been provided by Potter-Efron and Potter-Efron (2006), who describe 'The Eleven Most Common Anger Styles and What to Do About Them', further underlining the popular view that 'anger' must be labelled, managed and micro-managed, as if it should be isolated from within an individual's 'lifeworld'.

Of further interest are Ekman's (2003) insights into anger: its themes and variations and how it affects our actions, behaviours, motivations and relationships. Ekman explores specific situations where anger is elicited, such as when one is physically restrained, or another is trying to hurt us physically or psychologically. Frustration with inanimate objects or people,

disappointment in others' treatment of us, and other examples of when anger is brought forth, as well as various ways of diffusing the effects of anger, help readers become aware of anger eliciting situations and what they could do when they find themselves in them. Additionally, Middleton-Moz (1999) provides an uncannily accurate (and somewhat humorous) way of bringing the anger sufferer face-to-face with their anger, including chapters on how anger can take the form of blame, retribution, illness, deviousness, righteousness and even killing. The 'overcoming' and control of anger is also explored by the Buddhist Nobel Peace Prize nominee Thich Nhat Hanh (2001), who identifies meditation and mindfulness as keys to dealing with it.

There are numerous other books of this type, all relaying the same message: if you are angry, control it!

Despite such growth in cognitive-behavioural literature on anger (Gollwitzer et al, 2005), this approach focuses on helping the individual simply understand their problem with a view to developing a solution, which appears to leave a large gap in understanding what it is like *in* anger. Thus even up to date anger management strategies are remaining relatively outdated.

A client of mine, telling me of his experiences during an anger management course, put it thus:

I was telling her (the anger management course leader) how angry and pissed off I was, and she said to me to just calm down and breath and count to ten. I could have smashed her face in. When I want to rip someone's head off the last thing I'm able to do is start counting numbers.

This approach, while contributing in part to the understanding of anger, is failing to capture the complexity of people's experiences in anger as an ongoing, ever-changing, visceral and existentially meaningful happening. This suggests a need to go deeper into the experience of anger, to examine it not only at a psychological level but also from multiple interrelated

perspectives. This may open up an appreciation of how anger is experienced not solely from a cognitive perspective, but as an embodied emotion within a contextually influenced lived experience.

## **2.5 Sociological perspectives on anger**

The sociological perspective explores human behaviour in terms of its connections to society as a whole. It invites us to look for the associations between the behaviour of individual people and the structures of the society in which they live, based on the premise that the reality of humans is socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

Within sociology, there are many theoretical approaches to understanding the dynamics of human emotions (Turner and Stets, 2006). Dramaturgical theories view actions as directed from a cultural script defining how emotions should be experienced and expressed. Power and status theories argue that when individuals have power, they experience satisfaction, confidence, and security, whereas when they lose power, they experience anxiety, fear, and loss of confidence. Additionally when individuals blame others for their loss of status, they become angry and aggressive, seeking to force others to honour their claims to status (Kemper and Collins, 1990). Schieman (2010, p.329) views anger as “a highly social emotion,” while Tavris (1989) adds that anger is often experienced as an interpersonal event.

The sociological study of anger covers a range of issues and looks to illuminate social relationships, norms, expectations and conflicts in society (Schieman, 2010). Here I will explore gender, age (such as the changes inherent in lifespan development) and social class in relation to anger, which whilst not being the totality of areas that are the subject of investigation within sociology (others for example include race, ethnicity, culture, disability

and sexuality) are generally considered to be among the main influential factors in understanding identity formation and behaviour (Schieman, 2010).

### **2.5.1 Gender and age**

From an early age the male expression of anger is defined and guided by how males are 'meant' to behave and react in society. It is shaped through socialization as young boys move through the lifespan; growing through puberty, becoming young men and maturing through to their middle and late years.

According to Pollack (2000, p.164), boys must "exhibit toughness and deny fear and weakness." Their emotional processes tend to be discouraged and can become over-controlled, as summed up in the classic admonition, 'big boys don't cry.' Since boys are not meant to be scared, their sense of vulnerability can be outwardly directed in the form of anger, encouraging an 'acting out' pattern of behaviour (Ayers et al, 2014).

As boys grow into men, these masculine gender norms play a part in the expression of anger (Jakupcak et al, 2005). These reveal themselves in the beliefs of traditional masculinity (Murnen et al, 2002) and in other ways, such as the stress resulting from violations of masculine norms (Jakupcak et al, 2002). Men's behaviour becomes activated in varying social and situational contexts, without the individual becoming aware of the 'norm' itself (Aarts and Dijksterhuis, 2003; Fitzsimons and Bargh, 2004).

Research suggests that there are age-related changes in the experience of anger, with older adults experiencing anger less frequently and less intensely than do their younger counterparts and using more inward-focussed strategies to soothe or calm anger (Phillips et



al, 2006). Lifespan theory (Erikson, 1959; Levinson, 1978; Bronfenbrenner, 1994) provides insight into the possible reasons for this, showing, for example, the paradoxical struggles men experience as they age “as an important factor in emotional development” (Carstensen et al, 2000, p.644).

In general, older adults have been found to experience fewer career-related, interpersonal, and life events, which may explain their lower levels of anger (Carstensen et al, 2000; Mirowsky and Ross, 2003; Phillips et al, 2006). Older adults are also less likely to deal with the complexities and anger elicitors of having children around, and they may well have more time, as well as experiencing fewer social and economic causes of anger (Mirowsky and Ross, 2003). However, Kilmartin (2000) suggests that men in later life, whilst better able to choose whether or not to conform to the gender stereotypical models they experienced growing up, also experience ongoing social pressure to adhere to masculine gender roles.

Adult anger can be expressed in distinctly purposeful situational ways, whether seeking to solve a problem, justify one’s feelings or intensify the feeling of anger itself (Davidson et al, 2000). It can also create a sense of power for individuals. As Jukes (2010, p.82) notes, “Anger ... possesses the added advantage of filling [a man] with feelings of potency and power – the very opposite of impotence or helplessness.”

Anger can also fulfil another masculine gender norm by helping to keep emotions such as fear and shame hidden and internalised (Fivush, 1989; Kuebli and Fivush, 1992). Learned through the negative reaction of others (Fuchs and Thelen, 1988), this can become a powerful force in men’s lives. As Gilligan (1996, p.122) remarks, “Many violent men would rather die than let you know what is distressing them, or even that *anything* is distressing them.” This

suggests that men's fear of expressing emotion may be more central to their expression of anger than factors of global masculinity (Jakupcak, 2003; Jakupcak et al, 2005).

These reinforcing strategies of regulating vulnerable emotions increase the likelihood that men will use such strategies in the future (Jakupcak et al, 2005). This emotion regulation function can be loaded with consequences, often damaging to an individual's well-being, social functioning, and physical health. There appears to be a price to pay for actively regulating, and inhibiting, one's emotions (Mauss, Cook and Gross, 2007).

While the masculinity norms discussed above have long been evident in men's behaviour (Bandura, 1973), there is currently discussion of the idea that traditional masculinity is 'in crisis' (Clare, 2000). Indeed Levant (1995) has decreed that masculinity has already collapsed, relinquishing men from these restrictive gender roles. When it comes to anger, however, the extent to which new social expectations surround male behaviour remains unclear (Thomas, 2003).

The current research will seek to investigate **young men's** experience of anger in an attempt to illuminate the anger experience, the pre-reflective meanings men have of this, the actions they take, and the possible sociological influences shaping their experience.

### **2.5.2 Class**

When anger is examined through the prism of class, with attention paid to such factors as educational level, income and working conditions, there is a distinct lack of clarity. This may be due in part to the difficulties surrounding the reporting of anger (Schieman, 2000). For example, in 1996, the US-based General Social Survey, carried out by the National Opinion

Research Center (NORC, 1996) found that well educated people were less likely to report anger within the family, but more likely to report anger at work, when compared with the less well educated.

While there are disagreements regarding the impact of education on anger (Mirowsky and Ross, 1995; Ross and Van Willigen, 1996), Schieman (2010) suggests that there is a reduced risk of anger in situations where there is little economic hardship, where a greater sense of trust prevails, and where households contain fewer people.

Generally, sociologists retain an overly constructionist view in which emotions are viewed as the product of culture (Turner and Stets, 2006), to the detriment of other potential influencing factors.

Anger is woven into all aspects of our social structures. The sociological analysis of anger plays an important part in furthering our understandings in areas of interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships (Schieman, 2010). However, sociological research is typically carried out at a macro level, focusing on social patterns and groups as opposed to individuals. For example, recent large scale research has focussed on using self-reports to elicit data on the range of anger descriptions people use to convey anger (e.g., annoyed, angry, outraged), to how they express anger (e.g., yelling) (Mirowsky and Ross, 2003; Schieman, 1999).

Research conducted through a sociological lens tends to focus less on the role of individual subjectivities and the impact of an individuals' ability to choose their actions in the face of social structures. These structures do indeed play a part in a persons lived world (Schutz 1932/1972), but may leave the actual nature of individually nuanced lived experience, as it is

felt, unexplored. Through investigating lived realities as they are experienced, with an appreciation of factors emanating from social, political, biological, psychological, and other areas impacting on the individual, knowledge into the lived experience of anger can be enriched.

## **2.6 Existential phenomenological perspectives on anger**

### **2.6.1 Existentialism**

At the heart of existentialism lie notions of truth and subjectivity. Truth in this sense involves not just the discovery of verifiable facts but also how one *relates* to those facts in a subjective sense. For Kierkegaard (1846/1992), it is the responsibility of each individual to make meanings and live authentically, a notion also reflected in the work of Nietzsche. Nietzsche's (1882) 'will to power' celebrates the notion of the individual striving to reach the highest possible position in life by welcoming and celebrating *all* the emotions, including anger, as part of the experience of being alive, rather than by leading a more rational and controlled existence. Whilst Van Deurzen (1997, p.246) points out that "anger is a panic response that demonstrates our position of loss and weakness. We often end up losing what we fought for."

Sartre's (1943/1969) engagement with the concept of 'will' and an individual's sense of agency or control includes the view that becoming angry, or choosing to be angry, involves more than a reasoning process and a decision (Heter, 2006, p.28). Instead, Sartre views the emotion of anger as both a voluntary and a controlling process. As Heter (2006, p.28) notes, "Sartre's thesis is that anger – like any mode of consciousness – is a way of living and in fact choosing one's relation to the world." Sartre (1948) sees anger as an attempt to reduce the tension inherent in a difficult situation by redefining the situation so that a less demanding solution can be found: what he calls the 'breaking of one form and reconstitution of another'

(1948, p.40). This transformation of form is in turn seen to transform our consciousness of a world containing the difficulties that anger may present (1939/1962).

For Heidegger (1927/1962), an emotion such as anger is not the result of cognition but rather an “existentially unmediated disclosure of the being of *Dasein*” (Morris, 2006, p.29). A German word originally used to describe the notion of existence, *Dasein* was the subject of ongoing translation and clarification by Heidegger in an attempt to explore what it is for humans to be ‘there’ (present) in the world. In the process, Heidegger offers important insights into emotion. Through his elaboration of ‘moods’, he shows how anger can become a potential motivator for *action* within an individual. For Heidegger, these ‘moods’ – colouring the experience of living – are born out of how the individual is attuned to the world; emotion is an aspect of how one attempts to become more attuned. As Van Deurzen-Smith (1997, p.242) suggests,

If we can become aware of the phenomenology of our emotions and the significance of each of their particular modalities, we can gain better understanding of our desires and fears and our engagement with the world.

### **2.6.2 Phenomenology**

Phenomenology, the study of structures of consciousness from a first-person perspective, offers a way to examine things ‘as they appear’ in our experiencing, along with the meanings those things have in our experience. These structures include thought, perception, imagination, emotion and desire, embodied and social action, and linguistics: what Husserl (1913/1973) described as ‘intentionality’, or the directedness of these experiences towards things in the world. Husserl posited prioritising one’s subjective experiences in an effort to gain a scientific account of the world (Smith et al, 2009). In this process there could be an enhanced emphasis on lived-experience as a more authentic basis for exploring the world (Finlay, 2011). This research holds the interrelated aspects of the ‘lifeworld’ (Van Manen,

1990), and explores the lived-experience of ‘being’ within anger from the various elements that make up one’s lifeworld, such as an individual’s sense of selfhood, sociality, embodiment, spatiality, temporality, project, discourse and mood (Ashworth, 2003).

For Van Manen (1990, p.4) “human science aims at explicating the meaning of human phenomena ... and at *understanding* the lived structure of meanings (such as in phenomenological studies of the lifeworld).” Van Manen (1990) describes lived experience in terms of what he calls the ‘existentials’: those aspects relating to *lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality). The lived experience is therefore seen to encompass the entire composite being, to represent, as Ratcliffe (2012, p.5) puts it, “a dynamic changing whole realised by an organism embedded in a complex world.”

In essence these ever changing impressions of ‘what it is like’ to experience the phenomena of the lifeworld delve further than a narrative, uncovering the ‘agency’ (or will to power) of the individual within any given experience. Why is this important? As is seen in much of the literature, the emotion of anger remains largely ‘unspoken’ about. Getting to the heart of the emotion can only really happen through phenomenological exploration of the lived experience. As Moss (1989, p.64) reminds us, “phenomenology does not isolate the subjective from the objective nor the feeling of “mineness” from the on-going behaviour in the world.” The whole experience, encompassing all the ‘existentials’ Van Manen (1990) refers to, can therefore be open to exploration.

Todres (2007) explores this rich ‘getting to know’ kind of enquiry through the study of embodiment, indicating an inherent link between embodiment, being, and knowing as fundamental aspects of the ‘lived experience’. Finlay (2011) unpacks this through *description* of the phenomenon, which she defines as “an event, object, situation, process as it is known through our everyday embodied experience of it” (p.16). From this phenomenological perspective, “bodily experience and sense of belonging to the world are one and the same” (Finlay, 2011, p.30). This reminds us that the complexities of individual lived experience and of the human condition can only be understood by looking at the inter-related aspects of the experience, and the whole that is greater than the sum of those parts.

This meeting of the parts and whole of experiencing can be found in Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002), who describes the body as the place where inner and outer worlds meet. Encompassing both the objective and the subjective, the body can never isolate itself or cut itself off from the intersubjective world. We are conscious of the world through our bodies and conscious of our bodies via the world; body awareness and ‘being’ are inextricably linked. As Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002, p.211) notes, “the body is a power of natural expression,” an insight which illuminates how bodily intentionality (the direction of perception) can express itself in (for example) anger.

This highlights how the experience of anger is woven into an individual’s existence, a kind of Heideggerian attunement where if we are ‘in’ the experience of anger, then the world is ‘seen’ as aggressive, threatening, dangerous or frustrating. Ratcliffe (2008) uses the term ‘existential feelings’ to describe how a person’s phenomenological experiencing of anger is conjoined with their sense of being-in-the-world.

Van Deurzen (1997, p.246) notes, “Anger is a dangerous emotion.” However, anger in itself cannot be considered as dangerous; much depends on the *meaning* attributed to an ‘anger’ experience. For example, I can be angry and control my reaction, or something more primal can occur. If I see a situation as a threat then the anger I experience can develop and emerge. Hence, anger is more than an emotion; it is a *lived* experience. As Matthews (2006, p.64) puts it, “A series of neuron firings in the brain only has any connection with anger if the person in whose brain they occur sees the situation as warranting anger on his or her part.”

The complexity of the lived experience of anger is acknowledged by DiGiuseppe and Tafrate (2007), who see anger as a phenomenon that happens within, yet is also assessed by others from the reactions they observe, the reactions that occur physiologically and the subjective reflection of the person experiencing the emotion. This suggests that anger is more than just a reaction. Bornedal (1997, p.153) puts it thus:

‘anger’ as a phenomenon is no longer anger, but something else. It is ‘anger’ in quotation marks. General and universal ‘anger’; ‘anger’ as a known human emotion, but never ‘my anger’. Supposedly, one cannot be both angry and study the phenomenon of anger at the same time.

This potent reminder of the paradoxes and ambiguities present within the human experience suggests that the question at the heart of the current study – ‘what does a young man *experience* when in a state of anger?’ – requires a multifaceted and multi-layered unravelling. The phenomenological approach adopted by this study offers a way of exploring the ambiguities of human experiencing and relating (Laing, 1960; Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Spinelli, 1989) in order to find out more about what the *experience* of anger is really like. As Laing (1967, p.15) wrote, “We do not need theories so much as the experience that is the source of the theory.”



The existential and phenomenological literature suggests that rather than being ‘one thing’, anger is *what it is* to the individual. More than simply an emotion, it can be experienced as a mood or through feelings; it can be experienced as a reaction, or be used as a form of control. The experience of anger also has spatial and temporal dimensions. It is an innate part of our relation to, and with, the world. This study aims for a closer understanding to all of these phenomena in the search for ‘what is there’.

## **2.7 Recent research on anger**

Over the past 15 years there has been a significant increase in research into anger within the fields of psychopathology, psychotherapy, psychosomatics and health psychology (Novaco, 2010; Fassino et al, 2003; Rutledge et al, 2000).

### **2.7.1 Quantitative research**

While anger has tended to be explored and assessed through interviews and observations, the problems associated with interviewers’ subjective interpretation have highlighted the need for more robust methods. Recent quantitative research has revealed a link between anger and health problems (Thomas, 2003; Suinn, 2001; Williams, 2010), and underlined the need to manage anger and its related emotions on the grounds of health and wellbeing (Fisher, 2005; Potter-Efron and Potter-Efron, 2006; Itten, 2011; Hall, 2009; Davis, 2009).

However, the limitations of such quantitative research were indicated by Thomas (2003), who found that the use of standardized questionnaires highlighted only what was measurable (for example, aspects of angry behaviour such as cursing or hitting). To gain a deeper understanding of anger, Thomas (2003) suggested, it was necessary to explore the actual *experiences* of anger in the individual.

Quantitative methods tend to use anger measurement tools. The most widely used in both clinical and research settings remains the updated STAXI-2 (Spielberger, 1999b). This was developed further by Novaco and Taylor (2004) in an attempt to gain empirical data on the different dimensions of state anger and trait anger (see section 2.4.2 above). Aspects such as temperament and reaction are also provided for in the STAXI-2's scoring element. In terms of the *expression* of anger, three primary dimensions have been highlighted: anger-in, anger-out, and anger-control (Spielberger, 1999b). Anger-in describes how an individual expresses anger internally by suppressing it. Anger-out relates to when the individual expresses anger externally towards either people or objects. The anger-control dimension, which emerged from factor analysis of the previous two dimensions (Fuqua et al, 1991), is where the individual exerts *control* over the expression of anger.

A definitive tool for assessing anger and its dimensions, the STAXI tool is “based on a multidimensional definition of the construct of anger” (Fuqua et al, 1991, p.440). However, as Fuqua et al point out, the potential variability of stimulus settings requires knowledge of how these impact the instrument of measurement, making it inaccessible to those without adequate training.

From a clinical psychopathology perspective, anger has been classed as a predictor for violence, underlining the need to measure it. Novaco's (1994) theoretical analysis sought to encompass both the interpersonal *and* the social dimensions of anger. The Novaco Anger Scale (NAS) (1976, 1994, 2003) consists of four factors to measure anger: *Cognitive*; *Arousal*; *Behaviour*; and *Anger Regulation*. Conjoined with the NAS is the Provocation Inventory (PI), which provides an index of the intensity of the anger in varying different situations. Along with the STAXI-2 and the lesser used Multidimensional Anger Inventory

(MAI) (Siegel, 1985, 1986), these tools offer ways of measuring and indexing anger on predetermined axes. The 38-item scale of the MAI has been described as representing “a combination of numerous anger facets and ... therefore a good choice to test convergent validity” (Culhane and Morera, 2010, p.591). But while offering a range of ways to describe the nature and intensity of an individual’s anger, such tools cannot capture the actual state of anger as personally experienced by the individual. They look more at concluding what should be done with anger, rather than engaging with the lived experience of it.

There is also the question of the biases that may be present in the response patterns to such questionnaires. How people *want* to be seen is just as important as how they see themselves. As Gollwitzer et al (2005, p.57) note, there is a “tendency to respond in accordance to a social desirability (SD) criterion.”

### **2.7.2 Qualitative research**

Qualitative research has grown rapidly in use since the 1990s, especially in the areas of mental health and psychology. As Harper and Thompson (2012, p.5) note, such research enables an “understanding of experience and processes.” However, in relation to anger in men, there is still a paucity of research. I was shocked initially at just how under researched this area was, even within the *International Handbook of Anger* (Potegal et al, 2010), no qualitative research had been included.

Recent qualitative studies that focus on the experience of anger in men include Thomas’s (2003) descriptive phenomenological study into the meaning of anger, based on a sample of 19 middle-class American men aged 20 to 50 years. This study used the phenomenological methodology presented by Pollio et al (1997), with its use of dialogue and grounding in the

philosophical traditions of existentialism and phenomenology. Participants were asked to begin by thinking of some occasions when they had been angry and describing those experiences as completely as possible. This gave them free reign over their descriptions, in line with the phenomenological tradition.

The study highlights a number of areas, including participants' perspectives on what they deemed 'right' or 'wrong' behaviours in terms of "proper human conduct (e.g., truth, fairness, sportsmanship, and professionalism)" (Thomas, 2003, p.167). Participants also raised the issue of control, in relation to both their emotional control of anger and their control over external situations. Rich metaphorical descriptions of anger were interwoven into the participants' narratives, bringing alive the intense (and for most unpleasant) physical arousal they experienced in their bodies during anger.

The study explored the relevance of socially constructed ideas on anger in men, as well as experiential aspects such as personal ethics, lack of recognition, incompetence, justice, anger at not being able to 'fix' something, and anger towards other vehicle drivers. Issues of time and temporality were also examined, in particular on anger *then* (past volatility) versus anger *now* (calmer and more considered).

One interesting (and questionable) conclusion drawn by Thomas (2003) is that of the absence, in the men's narratives, of episodes in which they became angry with their partners suggesting that anger is less figural to men who are in intimate relationships. While not ruling out the possibility that this finding may be linked to men lacking the 'language' to articulate their feelings, Thomas (2003) does not elude to this beyond citing Levant's (1995) somewhat inconclusive findings about *alexithymia*, a term used to describe an inability to identify and

describe emotions in the self. Thomas (2003) concludes that it is not the eradication of anger that is important, but rather how anger is channelled.

While Thomas's (2003) study provides some rich description of men's anger experiences, it reaches some questionable conclusions about the reasons behind men's anger and the various societal influences on men as they enact their social roles. In addition, through being concerned with gender similarities and differences, it could be said that the study gets caught up in *explaining* men's anger as opposed to investigating the phenomenon as it is actually experienced. Also, the age range of the participants (20 to 50 years) is rather broad; men at 49 are in a different part of their life span and may have a very different outlook on their emotions (due to their experience of life) than those aged 21. In the current study, I focus specifically on young men (20-25 years) and their experience of anger in an effort to limit as far as possible the impact of generational and maturational change.

This study also classifies the participants as 'middle class'. All 19 participants were designated middle class, with the possible exception of one, seemingly on account of his job/career classification. This suggests that job description alone was used as an indicator of class, a criterion which seems unrepresentative of class from a broader socioeconomic perspective (Crompton, 2008). While social class *is* an important aspect when exploring and understanding the experiences of being human, it is challenging to define, and difficult to operationalise in research (Liu, 2013).

Thomas (2003) also provides a detailed account of how the data was analysed: an impressive process in which between 10 and 15 faculty members and doctoral students assisted with the bracketing process as well as interpretation. The final stage of the analysis involved providing

a sub-sample of participants with a summary of the study themes in order to verify that they were consistent with participants' experience of anger. However, it is not clear how many participants were included in this sub-sample, on what basis they were selected, or how this verification process looked. Nevertheless, this verification process does add weight to the credibility and validity of the interpretations.

In this research I seek to focus on the experience of anger and what is important for these men from a narrower age range and from a United Kingdom perspective.

In relation to the issue of reflexivity, Thomas (2003) provides limited information on the interviewer's reflexive process, leaving us unclear about its impact/influence on the study. My study aims for greater transparency regarding the interviewer's role in the research process by making specific reference to reflexivity issues at every stage of the process.

Thomas et al (1998) also had previously carried out phenomenological research into women's anger, again using the phenomenological methodology presented by Pollio et al (1997). In this earlier study, which explored anger with a group of 29 women aged 21-66 years, participants raised such issues as confusion around feelings, lack of respect, violation of values, and unfairness and lack of reciprocity within relationships, which they saw as leading to loss of personal power and control. Mention is made of their process of reflexivity: during 'bracketing' interviews that took place before the main interview process, the researchers had the opportunity to set aside personal anger experiences. The current study aims to include and elaborate upon such a reflexive process and to gain rich idiographic detail of the experience of anger.

Eatough and Smith (2006a) offer further insight into women's *feelings* of anger through their use of interpretative phenomenological analysis in a study involving a single participant. Concurring with Goldie's (2000) view that emotions are intentional, they argue that emotion (anger included) is "world-focussed rather than self-focussed" and that "when you are angry, you are angry *at* someone" (Eatough and Smith, 2006a, p.484). They attempt to clarify this 'at' process by exploring the phenomenological aspect of what this is 'like', or how anger 'appears' to the individual. Concurring with Frijda (2005), Eatough and Smith (2006a) note how existing descriptions of the experience of emotion as "bodily feelings" (p.484) fall short of the real lived experience.

The research highlights a number of areas, including the increasingly intense physical experience that can accompany anger, and how the process escalates over time, becoming skewed to the point of dissociation. The way in which the participants enter into a narrative in order to make sense of their experience is shown, and a link is made between anger and excessive consumption of alcohol. As with previous research the issue of control is present, this time more explicitly referred to as suppression and restraint.

Through the lens of phenomenology, Eatough and Smith (2006a) theorise their participant's experience of emotion, paying attention to the role of the body in anger. Arguing that "being angry is an experience which is *lived* through the body" (p.494), they emphasise the importance of the *body-subject* perspective proposed by Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002).

Interestingly, Eatough and Smith (2006a) originally set out to explore the processes involved in individuals' resolution of conflict, rather than anger specifically. However, the rich and textured narrative emerging from the interview process encouraged a change of focus to a

single person idiographic case study aimed at capturing one participant's emotional experiences of anger. However, the switch from conflict resolution to the experience of anger may have influenced the purity of how anger was experienced. Additionally the shift from several participants to a single participant may explain why little information is provided about the method of recruitment or inclusion/exclusion criteria.

The iterative analysis of the data produced a set of themes that underwent an independent audit (Smith, 2003) to support the validity of the study. The themes offered interesting insights into the meaning-making of the participant, and, as in Thomas' (2003) research, the issue of control was also present.

In another study, Eatough and Smith (2006b) explore the difficulties involved in explaining the experience of anger. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis and working with the same female participant as in their already cited study (Eatough and Smith, 2006a), they explore the process of making meaning within the experience of anger. Their study highlights the involvement of the participant's physiological and cognitive arousal processes and the situational context of the emotional response, as well as the influence of cultural and social perspectives. The current study aims to continue the exploration of this meaning-making process through the interpretation of the experience and towards a more detailed account of what it is like within anger, especially from the male perspective. I also aim to make the issue of researcher reflexivity more present than it appears in Eatough and Smith's (2006b) research.

While the (2006b) paper underlines the need to understand the discourse of the anger experience, it also positions itself against and highlights the tendency of methods such as



discourse analysis and discursive psychology to involve the lifeworld of the participant, with all the complexities that entails. In the process, some elements of the individual's 'lived' phenomenological experience may get lost, and one is left wondering where the 'person' has got to. As Eatough and Smith (2006b, p.118) note, "Discursive psychology's focus on how individuals 'do emotion' rather than on how individuals 'be emotional' means that the lived experience of the individual becomes nothing more than social activity."

The question remains for the researcher as to how rich an enquiry into 'anger in men' would be achieved with just one participant (considering how little this has been explored). The research of Eatough and Smith (2006a, 2006b) suggests that working with a number of participants, rather than simply one, may result in an exploration of the anger experience in which both commonalities and differences can emerge. Whilst the themes that emerged from their participant's story were interesting, the need for a more reflexive process within the research experience itself was apparent.

Revisiting the original group of women participants, Eatough et al (2008) returned to the original texts and explored further bodily experiences together with participants' use of metaphor to describe their experience of anger, transcending pure description to draw closer to the phenomenon of anger. This more personally intimate connection (researcher and researched) is described strikingly in Eatough's (2009) paper (which later revisits this 2008 study with a hermeneutic lens) detailing the experience of the other in this study when interviewing:

There was a shared recognition and shared participation when one of the women pressed her fist over her heart. I felt as if I was living and feeling the heartache in the moment she was reliving it. There was a pure quality to the experience, as if I had, for a moment, stepped into her life and understood what it was like to feel her pain and anger (2009, p.194).

Eatough here describes the movement, the 'relational dance' (Finlay, 2006), between the lived world of the participants and the narration of their stories, giving importance to the notion of empathic engagement.

As well as the illumination of bodily experiences and the use of metaphor, Eatough et al's (2008) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study illuminates more of the subjective experience of anger, such as how it escalates within the participants, what behaviours they experience (such as crying, sobbing) and the additional feelings they experience, such as happiness, guilt and hurt. Different forms of aggression related to the anger experience are offered as well as moral judgements made around the issues of injustice, unfairness and rule violation.

Taken from the original research (on resolution of conflict) conducted with five women with an age range of 28 to 32 years, this research highlighted the socioeconomic status of the participants as living in areas of extreme social need, who were either married or cohabiting, and who, with the exception of one participant, were mothers. It appears in the paper that the emphasis on aggression is a clear point of focus, anger being the pre-determinant of this, alongside gender differences.

The hermeneutic phenomenological and idiographic analysis of the participants experiences here, in line with the essence of IPA, are an important focus for the study. There appears to have been a clear and ordered process of recruitment (albeit for resolution of conflict), which gives considerable weight to the validity of the study alongside the dual interview process that was employed. Adding to this is the subsequent openness of the procedures employed for the data collection process right through to the transcription of the data, including an

independent audit, as suggested by Smith (1996). The interviews were for example conducted within a two week period so as to exact a reliable and consistent essence within the meaning making process. As with Eatough and Smith's earlier (2006a and 2006b) studies I aim in this current study to unearth more of the process of anger from the male perspective, not specifically focussing on aggression, or the consequences of anger, but more so looking to illuminate the phenomenological lived world experience, recruiting participants who consider themselves with anger issues specifically.

A very dissimilar approach to the research above, yet which holds some interesting insights in its focus on the qualitative structure of experience, can be found in De Rivera's (2006) method of 'conceptual encounter', which explores the essence of anger in a way that avoids or minimises researcher bias. Through this method, De Rivera seeks to get actively involved with the researcher's considered conceptualisation of the participant's experience, with the aim of enabling the participant to review this and check it for accuracy. Participants are thus offered the opportunity to agree or disagree, and to fine-tune the experience towards gaining an accurate, nuanced representation of their lived experience. In essence, the 'conceptual encounter' becomes a collaborative process of exploration and unearthing:

After the research partner has shared an experience and the investigator has offered a conceptualization, the two must work together to determine whether the conceptualization fits the experience. Of course, it may be immediately apparent that there is an excellent fit, or that there has been miscommunication ... When these cases are pursued, something new is learned (De Rivera, 2006, p.219).

In De Rivera's (2006) study of anger, participants' accounts revealed a number of themes, including participants' expectations around their anger-related values: for example, their expectation that the object of their anger (the other person) 'ought' to behave differently, or that things 'should' be different. De Rivera goes on to show how issues such as responsibility, choice, and belonging impact the way in which these values are experienced.

Turning to instances of anger where these ‘ought’s’ were considered to have been violated, De Rivera (2006) explores embodiment within the anger experience and the ways in which a participant’s world can be affected during moments of anger, in the process challenging their values and what they consider ‘ought’ to exist. There is a suggestion here that anger can serve to maintain a position, with control being exercised by the distance or closeness maintained in relation to the object of anger.

In De Rivera’s (2006) method, the search for knowledge begins with an initial conceptualization. Since this assumes the “existence of a term that names the experience to be studied” (p.232), the limitations of this method seem bound up with the cultural and linguistic nuances inherent in any description of an experience. As De Rivera notes, “it is unlikely that an American investigator would discover and explicate the experience of sweet dependency denoted by the Japanese term *amae*” (2006, p.232). What also gets lost is the ‘situational’ context of the emotion being studied. This appears to be a potential stumbling block to gaining the ‘what it is like’ of the anger experience. Whilst De Rivera’s (2006) conceptual analysis offers insights into the experience of anger, it provides little information about participants, or when and where the research took place, and so lacks in terms of offering any meaningful possibilities for comparative analysis within the current study.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

On the basis of the limited available research reviewed here, and given the apparent focus on women and the diverse age-range of participants, there is a need to delve into the specific experience of anger among young men. The current study seeks to provide such an opportunity by foregrounding the participant’s (young men) voice in their experiencing of

anger. The methodology looks to lend itself to this end by allowing space for each participant's experience of anger to emerge in all its complexity.

In addition, there appears a gap in research being carried out by somebody with a psychotherapeutic background, and most especially an existential psychotherapist such as myself, holding an "appreciation of everyday human experience" (Finlay, 2011, p.165), with awareness of various therapeutic skills in unearthing lived experience, and in addition, experience in applying the process of reflexivity.

The current study looks to contribute to the fields of psychotherapy and counselling. It does not seek to define a generalised programme that can be delivered; rather, it hopes to identify issues within anger that may be important to explore in psychotherapeutic training and in therapy.

The current research will look to explore young men's experience of being *in* anger as interviewed by a man, with the aim to illuminate what is meaningful to them. It seeks to inform knowledge in an area that is under researched and theorised and thus hopes to offer insight into what can support individuals' awareness in their experiencing of anger.

## **2.9 Reflexive exploration**

During this journey through the literature on the emotion of anger, particularly in relation to men, I have been aware of a paradox: that while the literature on emotion is extensive, that on anger in men it is limited, with the experience of anger among young men emerging as even less explored. Much of the existing research focuses on causes and explanations, with a view to establishing control over anger or managing it more effectively, and there is a lack of

research looking to understand the lived experience of anger, the ‘what is it like’ essence. This is the gap which the current study seeks to address.

As I read through the previous studies I became aware of an uncertainty growing within me as to the task I had taken on in wanting to get a deeper understanding of anger. Part of me wondered if there was a good reason for the lack of research on anger in young men, and I questioned whether I was stepping into an area that was too complex to work with through a phenomenological lens, especially considering my relative inexperience in the research role. Whilst the literature on emotion was immense I was mindful of the need to draw out the primary literature relating to my research question, and that I had to be focussed or else I would be distracted away from anger and its phenomenological essence.

Getting more connected to the research question (and some helpful research supervision) assisted me in structuring what was important to explore in terms of the literature, and build my study within the current body of work. Throughout this I carried however a continual nagging doubt that never seem satisfied, my unease related to a questioning as to what I had missed. I was convinced that in finding so little research about the qualitative experience of anger that I must surely have missed not only relevant studies, but a whole body of work. I couldn’t understand the lack of research from this perspective. My dismay was highlighted early on in my research when I ordered my copy of a long anticipated major text, the *International Handbook of Anger* (2010). I was excited to receive my copy of a compiled 32 studies on anger from a variety of biological, psychological and sociological studies on anger. As I slowly leafed through this 580 page text however, my heart sunk as I realised not one single study included qualitative research, let alone from a phenomenological perspective.

My doubt grew and I questioned if I was seeking insight into an area that was of no interest to anybody apart from me.

As I read through the literature however it started to make a little more sense in terms of how anger has taken a back seat in research terms to other conditions such as depression and anxiety. I also reconnected with my own reason for wanting to carry out the study in the first place, and the fact that the paucity of research was evident reinvigorated me to discovering more about how young men experience anger. Indeed in reflecting, I feel now that my confusion as to the lack of research actually helped me in gaining understanding around anger, as in the process of my peripheral reading *around* the experience of anger into areas such as aggression, violence and rage – in the hope I would discover something relevant – I ultimately narrowed my focus continually back to my research question.

I found the historical and sociological literature around anger fascinating as an area that I have the least experience in. Having been a practicing therapist for over 20 years, as well as a psychotherapy tutor, the sections on psychotherapeutic techniques were familiar. Upon exploring the existential phenomenological literature however I was surprised at how the literature challenged me, as despite my years of training in existential psychotherapy, defining the literature felt for me the first real test of my understanding of it. In itself, writing the literature review has been a tremendously helpful experience in deepening my awareness of the complexities and nuances involved in anger, and the human condition.

## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Aims**

In this chapter, I set out the methodology adopted for this study. I begin by discussing the research paradigm and the philosophy behind the methodology, along with the epistemological position adopted. I explore the sources and limits of knowledge, and the methods of obtaining it (Burr, 2003; Engel et al, 2007), in an attempt to provide a rationale for the knowledge sought in this study and why a particular method has been selected (Creswell, 2007).

I then present the underpinnings of the phenomenological approach and of my chosen qualitative methodology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). I outline the elements inherent in the IPA approach: phenomenology, the hermeneutic circle and idiography.

Following this, I relate the methodology employed in this study to the specific subject being studied, namely anger. I discuss the limitations of the chosen methodology and then position my choice of IPA over other qualitative methodologies, critically evaluating those alternatives in relation to the subject and research question this study is concerned with. I explore then my own reflexive process while working with the methodology of this study, before ending the chapter by exploring issues of validity.

Qualitative research has been defined by Denzin & Lincoln (2005, p.3) as:

a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible ... This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.



Harper & Thompson (2012, p.5) also define the qualitative approaches as enabling “understanding of experience and processes”, while Langdridge (2007, p.2) adds that qualitative methods are “concerned with the naturalistic description of interpretation of phenomena in terms of the meanings these have for the people experiencing them.”

In accordance with these definitions, this study seeks to make visible the quality of the lived-experience of anger and also to make sense of the phenomenon as experienced by the research participants. While it is not the aim of the research to identify ‘stages’ within the anger experience, if these emerge they will form part of the findings. What is of greater pertinence and importance is to get a clearer understanding of what the experience of anger is like and how this experience impacts and affects the lifeworld of each participant.

The choice of method used in this study to elicit this deeper understanding is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The process of IPA will be used to engage with the data gained from the transcripts of the participants’ interviews, towards gaining deeper understanding of, and further knowledge about, the lived experience of the anger phenomenon.

### **3.2 Epistemological position**

For any meaningful evaluation of a research project, it is necessary to know its objectives and what kind of knowledge it aims to produce: in other words, the epistemological basis of the research. Making sense of the lived experience of any phenomenon is by its very nature a complex process unlikely to be captured by any preconceived structure. This study aims to examine the phenomenon of *anger*, a dynamic emotional, physiological and psychological experience which can exist on a continuum, from an ongoing, latent bubbling of emotion

waiting to explode at one pole to the eruption of all-consuming rage at the other (Itten, 2011).

In order to investigate such a complex phenomenon there is a need to consider ‘how’ this might be most effectively done. This is of equal importance to the elicitation of data regarding the phenomenon. In this sense, the use of the qualitative research approach offers the ability to go beyond simple description of the phenomenon to the evocation of a deeper, more visceral engagement: one in which the texture of the phenomenon as it is experienced and the sense-making involved in the process can be entered into.

Qualitative research draws on a variety of epistemologies. It embraces viewpoints and assumptions derived from the personal standpoint of the researcher in relation to the nature of the world, the meaning of knowledge and the role the researcher plays in this. Epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with the nature, origin, validity and limits of knowledge. It examines how our minds are related to reality, and whether these relationships are valid or invalid. First used by James Frederick Ferrier (1808-1864), a Scottish metaphysical writer, the term epistemology questions what knowledge is and the extent to which it can be obtained.

Epistemology asks, how do I know the world? What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known? Every epistemology ... implies an ethical-moral stance towards the world and the self of the researcher (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.157).

Willig (2001) and Madill et al (2000) group epistemologies under three categories: realist, contextual constructionist, and radical constructionist.

**Realism** as a philosophical position holds that what we know about an object – our conceptual schemes, perceptions, linguistic practices, beliefs – exists independently of our mind. It argues that our sensory data simply reflects or corresponds to a world where truth consists only in the mind's correspondence to reality. Realism therefore opposes

the epistemological stance of idealism, which proposes that what one knows about an object exists *only* in one's mind.

A **contextual constructivism** perspective contends that the wider contexts that surround learning (for example, culture, custom, religion, biology, tools and language) will impact how knowledge is formed by an individual.

**Radical constructivism** maintains that *any* kind of knowledge is constructed rather than perceived through the senses and that no matter how it is defined within the individual, that person has no option but to construct what he or she knows on the basis of his or her own experience. For example, I have no way of knowing that your experience of the world is the same as mine, because “the function of cognition is adaptive and serves the organization of the experiential world, not the discovery of ontological reality” (Von Glasersfeld, 1989, p.162).

### 3.2.1 A contextual constructionist epistemology

As Madill et al (2000, p.17) observe,

Qualitative researchers have a responsibility to make their epistemological position clear, conduct their research in a manner that is consistent with that position and present their findings in a way that allows them to be evaluated appropriately.

My own epistemological position in relation to meaningful sense-making aligns most closely with the contextual constructionist position. I see the individual as *creating*, rather than discovering, their personal and social realities, where knowledge is viewed through a viability lens, as opposed to a validity one. As Sexton (1997) notes,

The perspective of the observer and the object of observation are inseparable; the nature of meaning is relative; phenomena are context-based; and the process of knowledge and understanding is social, inductive, hermeneutical, and qualitative (p.8).

The contextual constructivism position declares that it is possible to have a ‘point of view’, a ‘personal truth’. This in itself describes the very nature of ‘difference’ present amongst individuals, a view shared by philosophers such as Kierkegaard (1846/1992), who considered that while objective facts are important, how one relates oneself to those matters of fact is as equal if not more significance. Nietzsche (1882/1974) understood truth as ever-changing metaphors, meanings, denotations and attributes (Wicks, 2008), a view also held by Foucault, (1984), who considered ‘truth’ problematic if viewed as an objective quality.

In terms of my approach to this research, I hold the perspective that truth exists as a subjective reality. In order for knowledge to become known, the relationship between the research participants’ experiences of anger and the context within which these occur needs to be considered by both participant and researcher (Willig, 2001).

Epistemological reflexivity requires an engagement with how the research question defines and limits what can be ‘found’ (Willig, 2001, p.10). In this study the research question seeks to elicit the lived experience of anger, itself a uniquely subjective phenomenon involving both differences and commonalities. The question itself requires a setting of possibilities, as offered by the contextual constructivism position, and it is for this reason that this epistemological position sits well with the research question. This is an important factor in the overall purpose of this research: the search for knowledge (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). In this case, the knowledge being sought relates to what happens *within* the phenomenon of anger. What is it within that experience that has the potential to result in a man no longer seemingly to be in control of his actions?

Further to this, the contextual constructivism position is in alignment with my perspective as an existential psychotherapist, in which my focus relates to the meanings that individuals place on their lived world experiences.

### **3.3 Phenomenology**

Phenomenology, which originated with the philosopher Edmund Husserl (1858-1938), has its roots in both philosophy and psychology. It is an eidetic method, concerned with a person's recalled subjective experience and perception of the meaning of an event, the 'what is it like?' as opposed to an understanding of the event as it exists in the external world.

Van Manen (1997, p.345) describes phenomenological understanding of this rich experience as "existential, emotive, enactive, embodied, situational, and nontheoretic." In phenomenological research there is an attempt to understand these perceptions in order to make sense of and interpret their meaning, enabling insight into a vast array of lived experiences, with all their complexities (Wertz, 2005).

For Husserl, experience is the foundation of all knowledge. Breaking from the positivist orientation, where recognition is given only to that which can be scientifically, logically or mathematically verified, Husserl introduced a process of phenomenological *reduction*, a term he used to signify a precise shift in attitude in which one can suspend judgments and bracket assumptions (epoché) about the existence or non-existence of the external world, in order to become freer of the contagion of presupposed conceptual frameworks. Husserl (1982, p.5) described this as the "natural theoretical attitude". Such a position assumes metaphysical realism: the view that most of the objects that populate the world exist independently of our thought and are simply real and factually existent. Husserl's

bracketing process can be seen to open us up to more of the subjective phenomenon, enabling a return to ‘the thing itself’, which is the lived experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), along with what is present and its meanings (Finlay, 2011). From this process of epoché, one can then begin to describe *what* is experienced, the elements of the phenomenon, (phenomenological reduction) and *how* that is experienced, the characteristics of the phenomenon (imaginative variation). As Willig (2014, p.52) puts it,

Through phenomenological reduction, we identify the constituents of our experience of the phenomenon. In other words we become aware of what makes the experience what it is ... The aim of imaginative variation is to identify the conditions associated with the phenomenon and without which it would not be what it is.

The process reveals the essence of the phenomenon, which is in line with the current study’s aim to capture the experiences of particular individuals (Smith et al, 2009).

In a departure from Husserl, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) argued that all description is always already interpretation, and that no observation or description is exempt from the impact of the observer's experiences, prejudices, presuppositions, and projections (Moran, 2000). For Heidegger, by seeking ‘understanding’, phenomenology involved a necessary interpretive stance which he called the ‘hermeneutic circle’ (Heidegger, 1927/1962). This holds that in order to understand the parts of an experience (both hidden and present) one must have sight of the whole, whilst at the same time the whole can only be understood through the meaning of the parts.

Willig (2014) illustrates this with reference to our understanding of language:

So when we read a sentence, we notice that an understanding of the entire sentence helps us to make sense of the meaning of individual words ... At the same time, we also know that if we did not understand the meaning of individual words in the first place, we would not be able to form an understanding of the meaning of the whole sentence (p.44).

Hermeneutics, as a philosophy and methodology of the interpretation of texts, involves both grammatical and psychological interpretation (Schleiermacher, 1998), where what is presented through the text, alongside the writers unique individual essence, enables “an understanding of the utterer better than he understands himself” (Schleiermacher, 1998, p.266). Thus, engaging in hermeneutic phenomenology offers the potential of gaining “meaningful insights which exceed and subsume the explicit claims of our participants” (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.23).

Given the phenomenological researcher’s search “to construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience” (Van Manen, 1990, p.41), there is a need to go beyond “the partiality of our previous understandings” (Finlay, 2003, p.108). Thus a bracketing process is required where the researcher puts “to one side the taken for granted world in order to concentrate on our perception of that world” (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009, p.13). This promotes a stripping away of potential meanings applied by the researcher, a vital aspect of assuring the validity of research (Willig, 2001).

Gadamer (1975) further describes the need for a continuing evaluation of the researcher’s own experiences in order to understand “the fusion of horizons between subject and object” (Finlay, 2012). This is echoed in Merleau-Ponty’s interpretive stance that “enquiry is a continuous beginning” (1960/1964, p.161).

### **3.4 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

The aim of IPA is to uncover ‘how’ participants perceive their lived world experiences in relation to the phenomenon under investigation, by standing in their shoes (insofar as this is feasible) and attempting to make meaning of their experience through the interpretive

process. It involves an attempt to understand the question ‘what is it like?’ (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). This assumes a ‘not-knowing’ position, one in which the researcher extends respect to the meaning-making of individuals.

For Brocki and Wearden (2006, p.87),

human beings are not passive perceivers of an objective reality, but rather that they come to interpret and understand their world by formulating their own biographical stories into a form that makes sense to them.

IPA acknowledges the multifaceted response to experience that is incumbent in everyday experiences (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). It also recognises that any analysis of these experiences will be only an interpretation (Willig, 2001, p.53). Such an interpretation involves a two-stage process which Smith (2004) refers to as ‘double hermeneutics.’ As the participant seeks to make sense of their personal and social world, the researcher “is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world” (Giddens, 1987, p.40).

This approach assumes that individuals can experience similar objective conditions (such as anger) in different ways, relative to their own personal thoughts, feelings, expectations and judgements. In addition, this approach recognises (as per the contextual constructivism perspective explored earlier) that the meanings people attribute to their experiences are also bound in some way by wider social aspects.

Sartre (1939/1948) considered that in order to understand emotion we must understand what it is about. In line with this notion, IPA was chosen as a research methodology for this study. With its roots in phenomenological philosophy (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), IPA looks



to uncover and examine subjective experience in all its dynamism, to get closer to how participants make sense of their own lived experience.

Although a relatively new qualitative approach, IPA has been used in a growing number of published studies (Chapman & Smith, 2002), in particular those investigating aspects of emotion (Smith, Flowers & Osborn, 1997; Eatough & Smith, 2006, 2007; Eatough, Smith & Shaw, 2008; Yorke & Dallos, 2015). It is suited to a data collection method where a detailed examination of someone's first-hand experience is sought (Smith et al, 2009). The interpretational aspect of the approach can also be informed by engagement with existing theoretical constructs, enabling deeper insight into the existential phenomenological underpinnings of the researcher (Larkin et al, 2006) and the psychological literature (Shinebourne, 2011). IPA is therefore suited to personal and in-depth discussion, creating space for participants to think, speak and be heard (Smith et al, 2009) and to recognise their 'self-interpreting' ability (Taylor, 1985). As a variant of hermeneutic phenomenology (Finlay and Ballinger, 2006), IPA has an idiographic focus geared to capturing the specific and particular of individual experiences.

A focus on individuals' unique meaning-making requires cautious, careful analysis and (to be most effective) a small sample of participants. The idiographic approach aims to explore the 'particular' of each participant's experience and the meaning they make of those occurrences ahead of any universal meanings or general statements (Smith, Harré, & Van Langenhove, 1995). Malim et al (1992) view the idiographic nature of IPA as addressing the uniqueness of each individual and the need for an in-depth picture. Shinebourne (2011) further reminds us that the specifics of individual cases can also "illuminate a dimension of a shared commonality" (p.47), another concern of the current study, which seeks to add to

current knowledge both of what is present in the *individual* experience of anger and what *collectively* appears to resonate.

In addition to the considerable body of quantitative research on anger (Ax, 1953; Zelin, Adler & Myerson, 1972; Novaco, 1974; Spielberger et al, 1990, 1995; Novaco & Taylor, 2004), there is a limited body of qualitative research investigating anger and the meanings made in relation to it. However, thus far only a very small proportion of this research has used IPA as its methodology.

As Thomas (2003, p.163) notes,

the deeper meanings of anger, with regard to violation of core values and beliefs, are not measurable by such [quantitative] instruments and cannot be explored without directly asking individuals about their experiences of anger.

In getting to the heart of the participants experiences as described by them, we therefore move away from assuming preconceived knowledge and towards ‘what is there’, doing so by attending to the source of the experience, described by Eatough and Smith (2006a, p.486) as an “experiencing, meaning making, embodied and discursive agent.” Eatough and Smith (2006a) further position IPA methodology as one committed to working with the complex meaning-making process, enabling the researcher to move closer to an understanding of the experience as well as possible ‘shared understandings’ (Yorke and Dallos, 2015).

In the case of this research, IPA provides a clear theoretical and methodological frame in which to explore the anger experience of a small number of individuals. It aligns with my personal epistemological stance, is suitable for my research question, and provides me, as a novice researcher, with a structured process of analysis, as laid out by Smith et al (2009).

### 3.4.1 Limitations of IPA

Whilst the strength of IPA lies in its ability to uncover previously unidentified phenomena (Shaw, 2001) there are a number of criticisms of the approach in terms of its conceptual and practical underpinnings. Willig (2001) identifies the role of language and the suitability of accounts as well as the issue of explanation versus description as the main problematic areas of IPA.

It is recognised in IPA that interpretations are constrained by participants' ability to articulate their thoughts and experiences (Baillie et al, 2000). Given that phenomenological research is interested in getting to the 'what it is like' of an experience, Willig (2001, p.63) argues that IPA relies too heavily on the "representational validity" of language itself. As Willig (2001) sees it, language is used to *construct* rather than describe reality; it is relative to the meaning the speaker gives it, and therefore does not constitute a true description of the experience itself. Willig (2001) also questions the expressive ability of participants to communicate the rich texture of the experience (Finlay, 2011).

Against this, it can be argued that IPA looks to capture subtleties and nuances, both in what is said and in what is unsaid, and that it seeks to get as close as possible by uncovering pre-reflective meanings within the sense-making process. To this extent, IPA aims to engage with the individual's sense-making of experience through the language they use (Eatough and Smith, 2006). However, IPA does not claim to uncover 'pure experience' (which Smith et al (2009) view as wholly inaccessible), nor does it claim to focus analysis on the language used to describe experience.

Willig (2001) further argues that to focus purely on ‘the experience’ is to ignore contextual issues, including the ‘why’ of the experience. In other words, there is a need to move beyond sharing the experience to identifying explanations. Smith et al (2009) address this argument when illustrating how IPA conforms with Yardley’s (2000) yardstick of sensitivity to context (one of Yardley’s principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research). This is expanded upon below.

In addition to this both Willig (2001) and Langdridge (2007) challenge IPA for being overly reliant on perception and cognition within its interpretive element, thus weakening its status as a phenomenological method. However, the interpretive element within IPA is guided by participants’ descriptions of a phenomenon and how it is understood by the researcher, whose focus is directed onto the participants’ embodied lifeworld, getting as close as possible to the embodied essence of the phenomenon they describe. As an approach, IPA is grounded in a philosophy focused on the lifeworld, rather than in cognitive processing (Langdridge, 2007).

Pringle et al (2011) question the small sample sizes advocated by IPA, viewing these as a possible limitation. However, Smith et al (2009) contend that the limited samples used in IPA research enable richer, more in-depth analysis. Wagstaff et al (2014, p.8) note that larger sample sizes may lead to “data overload”, resulting in “a greater focus on common themes and a consequent loss of idiographic detail.”

Giorgi (2010, 2011) has been particularly critical of IPA’s phenomenological and hermeneutic theoretical foundations, arguing that its methodical procedures do not meet generally accepted scientific criteria, including the criterion of replicability. For Giorgi, by its prescribing steps which set out ‘how to do’ its form of analysis, IPA is also in contradiction

with its core aims. Wagstaff et al (2014) add that in the IPA approach the interpretive role of the researcher contradicts the tenets of classical phenomenology.

However, Smith (2010) argues that IPA is not a prescriptive methodology, adding that prescriptions in quantitative research should not be equated with those of qualitative research, given the clear methodological differences. Brocki and Wearden (2006) concur with this position, arguing that if studies are methodologically rigorous, transparent and clear about their philosophical underpinnings they are of value. IPA research should be evaluated on the basis of its capacity to shed light on the phenomenon under study through the identification of themes and the discussion put forward.

In relation to **reflexivity**, Willig (2001) acknowledges that IPA addresses researcher reflexivity in the process of phenomenological interpretation. However, she argues that IPA fails to ‘theorize’ the reflexive process, leaving the question of ‘how’ the researcher’s own perspective impacts the process unanswered. Wagstaff et al (2014), in their analysis of eight IPA studies, found researchers struggling to reconcile retaining an idiographic focus whilst simultaneously developing themes, raising questions about the ‘how’ of conducting and maintaining reflexivity throughout the process. To make sense of this, however, it is important to bear in mind that IPA’s methodology does not seek to identify ‘facts’ or test hypotheses; rather, its focus is on capturing and exploring the meanings that participants give to their experiences (Reid et al, 2005) as well as the ways in which the lifeworld of the researcher influences the data, as acknowledged by IPA’s hermeneutic essence. As Shaw (2010, p.239) writes,

Reflexivity is not simply an awareness-raising activity that we engage in prior to and during data collection. It is a vital component of each stage of the research journey. As we have seen, understanding is not something locked inside our heads but is borne out of our interactions with the world in which we live.

Thus reflexivity is an attitude, rather than something that we do. The flow between interpretation and data characteristic of IPA – the reflexive ‘dance’, as Finlay (2008) puts it – weaves through the entire process as researchers strive “to move beyond the partiality of our previous understandings” (Finlay, 2003, p.108).

### **3.5 Alternative methodologies**

Over the years there has been a need to qualify qualitative research, mostly due to the desire to prove its credibility in the face of quantitative methods. This has led to some confusion as to the epistemological basis of certain qualitative methods (Sandelowski, 2000).

Nevertheless, as the methodological arguments continue, Smith et al (2009) identify four distinct qualitative methodologies: Grounded Theory, Discourse Analysis, Narrative Analysis and Descriptive Phenomenology. I now explore each of these in turn in order to provide a rationale for my choice of IPA as the methodology for this study

#### **3.5.1 Grounded Theory**

Originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Grounded Theory (GT) is considered suited to a sociological approach (Willig, 2001; Starks & Trinidad, 2007) concerned with comparing individual accounts of personal experiences. Whether from an objectivist (what is ‘there’) or constructivist (contextualised) perspective, GT involves a process very similar to that of IPA, with comparative analysis and categorizations emerging from exhaustive revisiting of the data. However, its essential aim of generating theory is at odds with the aims of this study: to get as ‘close to’ the phenomenon as possible in order to uncover the essence of ‘what it is like’, rather than to generate theory. Furthermore, GT seeks to utilise large

samples of participants, another aspect out of step with the scope of this study. As a result it was not deemed an appropriate methodology for the current research.

### **3.5.2 Discourse Analysis**

Evolving from linguistic studies, literary criticism, and semiotics, Discourse Analysis (DA) focuses on how individuals accomplish their projects and make sense of their reality through the mediation and construct of language (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). DA challenges the aims of the current study through its emphasis on deconstructing experiences, along with the meanings the participants make of those experiences. The use of DA would therefore have involved sacrificing the idiographic dimension of first-person meaning-making. This, together with my desire to explore the dynamic nature of participants' *experiencing*, led me to discount DA for this study.

### **3.5.3 Narrative Analysis**

Narrative analysis (NA) focuses on the ways in which people formulate and tell stories to interpret and make meaning of their world and hence has its roots in the social constructionist approach. Wertz et al (2011, p.224) argue that the stories people tell about their lives “represent meaning making; how they connect and integrate the chaos of internal and momentary experience.” NA does not subscribe to narratives as the essence of ‘truth’ or fact, but rather considers them as interpretive methods through which people represent their lifeworlds to themselves and to others. This approach was recognised at least partially relevant to this study. However, it was not seen to provide sufficient scope to elicit the ‘what is there’ element that was sought. In addition its focus seemed limited (Smith et al, 2009), given that narrative is only one way of meaning-making. Hence NA was not deemed a suitable choice for this study.

### **3.5.4 Descriptive Phenomenology**

Descriptive Phenomenology (DP) (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2008) was considered as a possible method for this study, given that participants' descriptions of the phenomenon of anger would form an important part of the process of uncovering their lived experience. The intuitive flow in DP is concerned with focussing on the descriptions in order to relate them to what is 'known' about the phenomenon of interest (for example, anger), rather than the experience of the person. This seemed out of step with an idiographic exploration of participants' embodied subjective experience (Smith et al, 2009), a central aim of the research question. There is also an assumption in DP that I can bracket my own biases and separate myself from the research.

However, whilst I value and undertake the process of bracketing, I hold that I can never fully discard my own biases to the phenomenon (which I aim to examine through the process of ongoing reflexivity), thus I rejected DP as my research methodology on the basis that at best my bracketing would be partial. In addition, my decision was influenced inasmuch that, as the researcher, making interpretations of the participant's experiences and the meaning they attributed to them "cannot and should not negate [my] prior understanding and engagement in the subject under study" (Reiners, 2012, p.119).

By choosing IPA as my research methodology, I have been able to remain faithful to my research aims of exploring the 'particular' of an individual lived experience (Finlay, 2011), to my phenomenological approach, to my appreciation of the idiographic, and to my underlying epistemological position. A further factor influencing my choice was Smith & Osborn's (2003) recommendation of IPA as an approach suited to the needs of novice researchers, particularly those working on topics with a limited published research base (as is the case with the lived experience of anger in men).



### 3.6 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is concerned with the complex relationship between knowledge production and the contexts of the processes involved, including the involvement of the knowledge producer and how they combine interpretation with the process of continual reflection (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). Awareness of how we think about our thinking (Maranhão, 1991) is seen as an important dimension of the research process. Relative to this is the notion of a reflexive stance, where one looks to bracket presuppositions and hold a ‘phenomenological attitude’, in order to go beyond possible ‘taken for granted’ understandings (Larkin et al, 2006; Willig, 2007), a process that can be a challenge to apply (Finlay, 2008).

So how does one apply this ‘phenomenological attitude’? To hold the phenomenological attitude of which one attempts to engage, psychological research requires an openness to the notion of pre-understandings and the impact they might have on the subjectivity of the researcher (Finlay, 2008). To allow for a meeting with a phenomenon ‘as it appears’, a reflexive stance enables researchers’ to be “conscious of and reflective about the ways in which their questions, methods, and very own subject position might impact on the psychological knowledge produced in a research study” (Langdrige, 2007, p.58). This kind of self-reflection is what can enable presuppositions to emerge from within the researcher, thus allowing them the opportunity to detach them from participants’ descriptions (Colaizzi, 1973).

Husserl (1936/1970) first described the process of ‘phenomenological reduction’: an experience in which it is possible to come to the world with no knowledge or preconceptions presenting themselves. The ‘reduction’ is a meditative transformation of the individual, where the epoché plays out, us no longer accepting what is taken for granted, thus freeing us

to come to things ‘as they appear’ and preparing us “to be transformed by wonder in the face of the world” Finlay (2008, p.11).

As Willig (2001) acknowledges, whilst lacking a theoretical stance on reflexivity, it is clear that IPA addresses researcher reflexivity in the process of phenomenological interpretation. This I see as embroiled within the hermeneutic process of IPA. Nevertheless, I note that the reflexive process I engage in, delineated explicitly at the end of chapters 2 to 6, and which permeates this study, goes beyond the IPA methodology as described by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009). This was engaged in with a view to developing a continual ‘reduction’ within the research, with a possible illumination of pre-understandings as a result, and showing an attitude of transparency that it was hoped would aid the reader with the process of the ‘triple hermeneutic’ – making meaning of my meaning making of the participant’s meaning making – so as to come to a closer view as to what emerged out of the data.

For the current research, I made use of a variety of strategies to engage reflexively. Before starting, I looked at my own experiences (personal and professional) of anger and then the possible impact my research might have.

My interest in anger, which goes back many years, stems from my own past experience of intense feelings of anger as well as my experience of helping others who have struggled with this emotion. After my own early struggles to make sense of the world and the angry feelings generated by this existential confusion, I found in my late teens a medium, or outlet, for my anger by joining the armed forces, where my anger was regimentally channelled into various military procedures. However, upon leaving the armed services, I struggled to reintegrate back into civilian life and experienced a re-emergence of angry feelings. Trying to make

sense of this led me on a search that culminated in me training as a counsellor and psychotherapist. This illuminated the complexities of emotion, greatly helping me to make sense of my previous turmoil.

My interest in anger was further fuelled by the shock I feel when I see young men rioting, or hear about violent assaults where anger appears to take over. I know this well, and also know that approaches to anger management such as ‘count to ten and breathe’ have helped neither me nor the men I’ve worked with. Taking conscious control when in the throes of anger is the last thing on one’s mind.

I began reflecting on my personal impact on the research even before beginning the study. I looked more closely at what made *me* angry, in order to illuminate any assumptions or presuppositions I might have around the subject of anger which might “impact on the research process and findings” (Finlay, 2008, p.17). I considered that in the past I had strong angry reactions to a number of situations, such as when I considered somebody was taking advantage of me, or where I felt the other was being dishonest in order to ‘pull the wool over my eyes’. I explored what it might be like for participants to be surprised at getting angry as they described their anger experiences in the interview, and whether they too would consider I had taken advantage of them if they then felt unprepared for this reaction. This highlighted for me the issue of ethical awareness: the need to appreciate the participant as more than just a part of the interview process and as a person existing beyond the research project (Frisoli, 2014).

I explored other situations where I became angry, such as when I had been stolen from or occasions when others had put members of my family in danger. Not knowing what

experiences my participants would divulge, I considered how my process of bracketing these areas would need to be present for me if I in turn was to be present to participants' accounts.

Given that I would not be in a position to pre-empt what participants might reveal, I became curious as to how anger might appear in the interviews. That led me to consider how I have experienced angry emotions. I was reminded of feedback I once received about how my physical form would change when I became angry. My head would extend forwards as though my neck had lengthened, and I would appear to bloat around my neck and face. I knew also that when I became angry I experienced a shaking in my whole body, extending through my arms and legs, together with a kind of white haze over my eyes, as if an opaque film had been placed over the top half of my head. It was an incredibly visceral experience whose intensity was matched only by my utter need to regain my sense of self, whether by escaping from the situation or by the other people backing down or admitting error in their behaviour towards me. The power of this response reminded me that it was possible that I could have a propensity to look for similar responses or reactions in my participants as they recounted their anger experiences. Whilst it would be undesirable to eliminate my own subjective experience (Giorgi, 1994) when returning to 'the thing as it is', I realised that in this case the participants' subjective experience of anger was paramount.

I also contemplated what I expected the research to reveal, as well as the implications those findings might have for professional healthcare. Due in part to my own therapeutic experience with anger, I expected to find a loss of control and hoped that in gaining a deeper understanding of how that process unfolded that the person experiencing anger might increase their sense of agency and learn how to prevent anger from taking over. I imagined that such a finding would have a major impact on anger management strategies in general and

also on my own therapeutic practice. As a professional I had experienced anger management as a hard problem to tackle, with clients often resisting going deeper into their understanding of their process. Often unwilling to change their behaviour, they would end therapy prematurely, frustrated and angry. I *wanted* there to be a different way, and I was conscious of my excitement of that possibility emerging from my research. It was a lot to hold. While confident that I could ensure my purposeful entering into a bracketing process, I was aware that I could not do this completely and that what was important was an awareness of my pre-existing beliefs and their impact on the research endeavour.

Adding to this were the excited reactions of several peers and supervisors, who saw my research on anger as having the potential to contribute to their own fields of interest (one had close military links and saw a need for more understanding in the treatment of PTSD). This made me conscious that throughout the research process I would need to keep ‘setting aside’ (Ashworth, 1996) as much as possible my own experiences and understandings.

Reflecting on the connections with my personal story around anger led me to ask what the anger experience might involve when viewed from a number of different perspectives. What happens when the emotion appears to take over and sense-making is lost? How might having a deeper lived-body awareness of being angry help an individual become more connected with an emotion that holds so much difficulty for those experiencing it, as well as those at the receiving end? Could greater understanding of the experience enhance therapeutic teaching and practice in this area? Seeking answers to these questions felt like quite an undertaking, bearing in mind my limited research experience and the need at every stage to remain true to the phenomenological attitude.

Keeping a research diary of my own thoughts, feelings and musings during the process enabled me to revisit my aims and their relationship to this attitude, as did regular feedback from my supervisor on the themes emerging in my analysis. On another level my own personal therapy helped keep me centred as to my role in the research process by enabling me to reflect on my own lifeworld and my personal biases, which were informed by my past and current experiences. By these means I was able to maintain a reflexive stance in relation to the data, and to recognise when I was drifting away from this process.

### **3.7 Issues of validity**

The growth of qualitative research over the last few decades has prompted much debate into issues of reliability and validity (Smith et al, 2009). Epistemological and philosophical concerns have come under scrutiny (Whittemore et al, 2001) as the creative possibilities of qualitative approaches are weighed against the rigor of quantitative research. There have been numerous attempts to introduce issues of validity, and criteria and techniques for assessing it, into the qualitative arena (Whittemore et al, 2001). This has mainly proved unsuccessful, perhaps because of the different epistemological and ontological assumptions on which qualitative research rests. It has been argued that such approaches cannot be applied in a systemic way, do not lead to high quality research if they are poorly implemented, and are in a sense misleading in the standard of quality they assume (Cohen and Crabtree, 2008).

Yardley (2000) identifies four suggested criteria for addressing validity, ones which a number of scholars recommend as offering the kind of flexible interpretation most suited to qualitative research (Langdrige, 2007; Smith et al, 2009; Shinebourne, 2011). The four criteria are: i) sensitivity to context; ii) commitment and rigour; iii) transparency and

coherence; and iv) impact and importance. Each of these will now be explored in relation to the current study.

### **3.7.1 Sensitivity to context**

Sensitivity to context relates to the elements informing the research, including the research methodology, the method followed and the epistemological position of the researcher. Also of importance are such factors as the research setting, the researcher-participant relationship (in terms of the balance of power and perceptions of ‘researcher as expert’, for example), and socio-cultural perspectives that influence the process: “normative, ideological, historical, linguistic and socioeconomic influences on the beliefs, objectives, expectations and talk of all participants” (Yardley, 2000, p.220). Sensitivity to previous research and existing literature in the area under investigation is an important consideration. The quality and ‘sophistication’ of the analysis presented demands rigorous attention to detail; it involves unearthing the nuances that may lie within observations and findings.

As part of my attempt to adhere to the criterion of sensitivity to context, I have set out my epistemological position in this chapter and have provided my rationale for the chosen methodology. In my literature review, I have demonstrated sensitivity to the existing literature. In terms of being mindful of the needs of the participants, I have sought to remain keenly aware of the sometimes volatile and explosive nature of describing powerful emotions such as anger. During interviews, I maintained a supportive and respectful attitude towards participants as emotional beings. I maintained this stance during analysis, and made a point of following up with participants and checking in with them to address any issues which might have arisen, in line with my psychotherapeutic practice. While it was made clear to

participants from the outset that the interviews were not ‘therapy’, I made a point of considering the impact of the interviews on participants and their personal narratives.

### **3.7.2 Commitment and rigour**

For Yardley, the criteria of commitment and rigour relate to the extent to which researchers immerse themselves in the relevant data and develop a level of competence in the research method employed. This, along with the appropriateness of the sample size, is deemed to result in a ‘completeness’ through the process of the data collection and its analysis (Yardley, 2000; Smith et al, 2009), one able to stand up to the kind of transparency that enables and promotes an openly reflexive attitude throughout the research process.

The current research benefited from a pilot study involving one participant and a peer review, both of which provided a basis from which the research could develop. My own commitment to the research topic is demonstrated by the fact that I have been working with clients presenting for anger management for just over twenty years. Such exposure, especially at a professional level, has assisted with the rigour of the research and has enabled me to engage IPA methodology systematically. I have been able to appreciate the importance of the idiographic nature of the research, to adopt a phenomenological attitude of getting ‘back to the thing’, and to make interpretations at varying levels of analysis (see Appendix 7 and 8).

### **3.7.3 Transparency and coherence**

Transparency and coherence relate to the clarity and cogency of the research findings, which enhance the value of research by enabling readers to get ‘close to’ the research method, the process of analysis and the subsequent *prima facie* meanings delineated. In IPA this is achieved by transparent presentation of the data collection measures, transcripts, theme



creation and analytical processes (Yardley, 2000; Shinebourne, 2011), all of which is designed to help the reader form their own opinion as to how the process was carried out. To this end, I have written a detailed description of the method and have included verbatim quotations from participants (see Appendix 7).

#### **3.7.4 Impact and importance**

Yardley (2000, p.223) argues that a piece of research should be judged by its impact and significance, since “it is not sufficient to develop a sensitive, thorough and plausible analysis, if the ideas propounded by the researcher have no influence on the beliefs or actions of anyone else.” In other words, it is futile to conduct a research project that few people will see or utilise.

In the case of this research study, my aim is to shed light on the lived experience of anger, an emotion with which many people struggle both personally and interpersonally, and to offer insights into the personal phenomenological process of anger. The aim is not to make any generalisations about anger itself, something which I consider to be in keeping with the phenomenologically focused nature of my research question. However, this study offers the possibility for further research, as will be discussed below in chapter 6.

#### **3.7.5 Independent audit**

In addition to Yardley’s four criteria, Smith et al (2009) discuss the value of independent auditing, which is seen to allow the entire research process to be ‘tracked’ and made sense of, from the organisation of the initial raw data through to the final report. This is deemed a way of keeping a disciplined approach to the entire process, and of making it possible to check

issues of validity through a 'paper trail'. The latter allows an independent researcher to make sense of what took place, or a supervisor to track the path between data and interpretation.

The current study demonstrates congruence with the goals of independent auditing through appendices which demonstrate and document every stage of the research process. The independent audit was also adhered to through my supervisor's questioning of my theme generation and through the researcher's own attitude, which sought to remain consistent throughout.

### **3.8 Reflexive exploration**

In the current study, the contextual constructionist perspective to which I subscribe has enabled the ongoing practice of reflexivity. The process of 'positioning' myself within an epistemological stance has proven to be a confirming experience and has added to my awareness of my own part in this research. This feels a congruent place to be; through my own professional practice I have experienced an accumulation of knowledge and experience that I can see has been shaped by different contexts. Through engaging in the differing areas that have influenced my positioning I have come to realise how much contextual differences have shaped my approach to understanding both my own experiences and those of others.

In attempting to define the methodology that best aligned with both my own epistemological position and that of my research question I found myself immersed into the similarities and differences between the differing methodologies, at first struggling with making sense of the finely nuanced differences. In exploring in detail what I deemed not appropriate as a methodological approach for my research, I gained a deeper appreciation for the intricacies of what I had chosen as best fitting.

This was further impacted by the experience I have gained over twenty years of working as a psychotherapist, where my initial trainings' 'theoretical base' was of an integrative nature.

The appreciation of a multi-theoretical approach which fitted the contextual nature of clients presenting concerns added to my epistemological positioning. In addition, my further training in existential phenomenological psychotherapy, and the deeper appreciation of the 'felt' problematic issues that my clients' presented, brought me closer to my own phenomenological attitude.

Whilst I am appreciative of the fact that I am a novice researcher, both the contextual constructivist position and my choice to position my research within the phenomenological arena feels congruent with my personal perspectives. In saying this however I am also aware of the possible impact of the potential biases this brings on the ultimate purpose of the research – the uncovering of 'what is there'. This for me has been the major impact on the process of defining my chosen methodology and writing this chapter. In becoming more aware of my own epistemological stance and phenomenological positioning and the reasoning behind it, I feel I hold a stronger appreciation of the alternative perspectives. I anticipate that in being mindful of this I will bring myself to the research in a more mature, informed, open, and honest way.

## **Chapter 4 Method**

### **4.1 Design**

This research was carried out with a small, purposive and homogenous sample, in accordance with the principles of IPA (McLeod, 2003; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Langdridge, 2007). The data was collected via semi-structured interviews, which were then transcribed verbatim. A multi-layered analysis was then conducted utilising the IPA approach (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith et al, 2009). This provided an idiographic overview of each participant so as to keep the analysis and the initial themes relative to each individual. The collective data were then moved into thematic clusters, enabling the identification of superordinate and subordinate themes which appeared to capture the essence of the participants' accounts.

### **4.2 Participants and sample**

Six participants were recruited in accordance with the small sample size that Smith et al (2009) suggest as most appropriate for IPA. As Smith et al (2009, p.51) note, "it is more problematic to try to meet IPA's commitments with a sample which is 'too large', than with one that is 'too small.'"

In my search for a homogenous sample, as advised by Smith et al (2009), I began by approaching two holistic therapy centres running anger management courses and asking them to disseminate the study's approved printed information sheet (see Appendix 3). I explained that I was looking for young adult male participants of similar age whose anger was deemed by themselves as 'out of control' at times. As a result, I was contacted by one potential participant who, after completing what proved to be the pilot interview for the study, was keen for me to invite some of his friends and acquaintances to participate in the

research. Each of these contacts then received the research information sheet to determine if they would be suitable participants.

I felt that as long as I did not know the individuals, this ‘snowballing’ was a genuine, speedy and efficient method of recruitment, one that helped identify possible participants without the researcher approaching them, which might have prejudiced subsequent interviews. However, it could be said that this method rests on participants’ judgement that others ‘fit’ the research criteria. With that in mind I determined that possible participants first met the sampling criteria of being male and between 20-25 years of age, and from the east of England. I considered that previous research put emphasis on the specific class (Thomas, 2003), and socioeconomic status of participants (Eatough and Smith, 2006a; Eatough, Smith and Shaw, 2008). However, in my recruitment I was aware that I could not easily recognise what class or socioeconomic status potential participants would fall into without questioning them, which again might have prejudiced subsequent interviews.

I stipulated that after participants had made contact with me, I would then meet them in order to explain the research process further and request their consent before conducting interviews. During this initial meeting, particular care was given to explaining the follow-up process, in view of the nature of the emotions being studied. I also ascertained that potential participants’ were familiar with discussing the anger they experienced from a male perspective, in light of stereotypical gender led expectations around male expressions of anger, so that they could adequately describe their experiences, and so that the interviews would not be an alien experience that might lead to potential harm and/or distress. I further determined that they themselves deemed their anger as ‘problematic’ and were aware of its impact on their world, and hence the interview itself.

Recruitment of the participants for this study commenced in December 2010 and the interviews took place between February and August 2011 in a dedicated counselling room that remained the same venue for the participant interviews throughout.

The pilot study for this research involved one participant. This then led to the recruitment of five further participants: young Caucasian men aged between 20 and 25 years of age, all originating from the south of England and residing in North Essex. No additional information about the participants was sought prior to the interviews so as to lessen the impact this might have on the research.

### **4.3 Research questions**

Following Smith et al's (2009, p.47) maxim that research questions "be grounded in an epistemological position," (p.47) the research questions formulated for this study were designed to explore the phenomenon under investigation (the lived experience of anger).

The questions I am seeking answers to in this research are:

- What is it like to live through a powerful experience of anger?
- What happens in young men within the anger experience that brings the possibility of driving them into a destructive process? By destructive I mean where they direct their anger out onto themselves or other people (hitting, kicking) and material objects (smashing and damaging possessions).

### **4.4 Data collection**

The method of data collection for this study was through semi-structured interviews. One interview per participant was planned, with a period of 1 hour set aside for each interview in

order to give the participant time to openly engage with the interview questions. All interviews were conducted in the same venue, a dedicated counselling centre.

During interviews, questions were kept open, exploratory, and oriented towards both process and meaning (Smith et al, 2009). Attention was paid to eliminating any prior theoretical constructs in relation to the experiential *expression* of anger (Spielberger, 1999), with the focus instead placed on the sense-making of experience. Questions were refined after the pilot interview, where I found they were too strictly focused and did not allow the participant to enter into a natural experiential dialogue or meaning-making narrative as much as they could have.

From the pilot interview emerged the need to include second-tier ‘prompting’ questions, to foster a more natural flow to the interview and facilitate a more meaning-making narrative. Given the nature of open questions in relation to lived experience, it was anticipated that there might be uncertainty as to ‘when’ questions had been answered (Salmon, 2002; Smith, 2009). The aim was to encourage answers from participants that remained within the scope of the research questions or did not deviate too far away from them, whilst at the same time facilitating an open, explorative process. To this end, a number of second-tier ‘prompt’ questions were devised (see Appendix 5) as a way of opening up potential areas for discussion (Smith & Osborn, 2003) where necessary. Examples of these included, ‘What happened?’ ‘How did it start?’ ‘How did it stop?’ and ‘How did you feel?’

During the interviews I also reflected the participants’ narratives to gain clarity, and used active listening skills to help them settle into the detail and essence of their experience. At all times I strove to remain mindful of the power that anger carries.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed, with all identifying information removed from the transcript. Once this had been done the recordings were then destroyed.

## **4.5 Data analysis**

Analysis of the data was in accordance with Smith et al's (2009) six-stage approach, as detailed below. Throughout the analysis my supervisors encouraged me to thoughtfully and creatively move through the six steps, which I did for each participant separately so that I could bracket themes that emerged. Initially each interview was listened to several times, to enable me to become accustomed to the tones and nuances of the participant's account. This repeated listening also gave me the opportunity to correct any mistakes in the initial transcription.

### **4.5.1 Stage 1: Reading and re-reading**

When reading and re-reading each participant's transcript, I noted in the left margin what appeared to be particularly poignant or pertinent words or phrases, as indicated in appendix 7. As I immersed myself in the text, I recorded other facets of the interview, such as the intensity with which my participants were recalling anger experiences. I also noted any thoughts and questions that came to mind in my reflexive journal.

### **4.5.2 Stage 2: Initial noting**

This second stage involved noting down every point of interest that emerged from the transcript, a process that required me to stay focussed on the language, style and the mood of participants' narratives. This enabled me to remain as close as possible to the meanings they were making of their experience.



During this stage, I sought to stay open to whatever emerged while at the same time remaining aware that analysis of the data was necessary. This involved a dualistic process of keeping close to the participant in their dialogue and also making notes of my thoughts as to what was emerging. After recording what appeared to be key points, I then engaged in a more interpretive process, commenting on the text and posing questions, as shown in appendix 7. Keeping the initial notes and my own interpretive process close together kept me mindful of the need to bracket as far as possible and then go back to the participant.

#### **4.5.3 Stage 3: Developing emergent themes**

The analysis progressed to the point where I was able to produce an account of the lived phenomenological world of the participant, in keeping with the idiographic focus of IPA. By immersing myself in the ‘what it is like’ aspect of anger in the participant’s lifeworld, I was able to get closer to the experience. This in turn enabled me to go back to the data and reduce the text and its accompanying meanings into emergent themes which, while retaining the complexities of the descriptions, seemed to best represent the participant’s account. This process required me to step back from the narratives taken as a whole experience, and move down into more specific chunks of text and analyse them in their own right, thereby enabling me to move through the hermeneutic circle (Smith et al, 2009). This process is shown in appendix 8.

#### **4.5.4 Stage 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes**

I then sought to examine similarities that presented themselves in the participant’s account, organising a table of potential themes. In the process, I also became aware of potential themes that were not as prevalent and were likely to be discarded. However, I kept these close, mindful that they might re-emerge as the analysis unfolded.

#### **4.5.5 Stage 5: Moving to the next case**

After working through the first participant's data and organising a table of potential themes, I then repeated the process for each of the remaining participants, aware of the importance of treating each participant's narrative afresh and bracketing any assumptions or ideas that had emerged from the preceding case.

#### **4.5.6 Stage 6: Looking for patterns across cases**

Once I had completed the analysis for all six participants, I began to look for patterns and themes across all six accounts. At this stage I became aware of strong connections in relation to some theme areas, weaker ones in relation to others, and in some cases isolated patterns that did not fit with any other descriptions. This resulted in the identification of three superordinate themes and six subthemes, as shown in the following findings chapter. With the patterns and connections now established, and with my themes identified, I began to write up my analysis.

### **4.6 Presenting and discussing the findings**

I began by writing an idiographic account of each of the participants with the aim of introducing a human aspect to the analysis that followed. I then contextualised the presentation of the themes and their sequential appearance, noting that what emerged from the analysis was but one possible account of anger in relation to the research question. The next step was to present the superordinate themes and the finer nuances contained within the subthemes. I finished the chapter with an account of my own reflexive process on the analysis process.

After the analysis I moved to the discussion of the key findings with a view to exploring what the research had illuminated in relation to the literature, and what new knowledge and understandings about anger might have been revealed. I addressed the possible implications of the key findings for the practice of psychotherapy, and explored possible future research. In my discussion, I also addressed methodological considerations, the strengths and limitations of the study, and issues relating to validity and quality.

## **4.7 Ethical considerations**

This study was given ethical approval by Middlesex University Ethics Board (see Appendix 1).

Kvale (2007, p.22) describes the research interview as a “moral endeavour.” Throughout the current research, the ethical dimension was of paramount concern. While ethical considerations are pertinent to any research, the nature of my investigation reinforced the need for sensitivity and awareness. Of all the emotions, anger can be the most explosive and at the same time the most taboo. As Ord et al (2000, p.94) note, interviews can be equated not only with “confidentiality, informed consent, and privacy, but also by recurrence of ‘old wounds’ and sharing of secrets.”

In this section I delineate how I approached the various ethical dilemmas inherent in my research undertaking.

### **4.7.1 Openness and informed consent**

Ramos (1989) identified three potential problems that can arise when undertaking qualitative research. Two of these are of particular relevance to the current study. The first concerns the

degree of openness within the researcher-participant relationship. Insufficient openness may result in deception, identified by Orb et al (2000) in numerous cases where researchers did not inform their participants (or those they were observing) that they were the subjects of a research study: instances include research by Humphreys (1970) and Clark (1996).

In the case of the current study, the participants (none of whom had had any previous psychotherapeutic contact with me) were informed of the nature and purpose of the research in advance via the participant information sheet (Appendix 3). It was repeatedly made clear to them that they could pull out of the process at any time, without any explanation or consequence. The information sheet also set out the potential discomfort, risks and adverse effects of participating in the study, with a view to creating as transparent an atmosphere as possible.

In view of the nature of the subject, I was aware of possible limitations to informed consent. While my participants may indeed have consented to take part in interviews, how could they consent to revealing something they might not have been aware of until it surfaced in the interview process? There was no way of knowing until the process unfolded what impact disclosures might have on a participant. Considering Orb et al's (2000) notion of the 'recurrence of old wounds, and sharing of secrets', especially when revisiting experiences charged with emotional content such as anger, I therefore endeavoured – before, during, and at the end of the interview process and subsequent follow up – to revisit the issue of consent with participants so that the consensual process was as transparent as possible.

#### **4.7.2 Subjective interpretation and confidentiality**

The second ethical issue identified by Ramos (1989) concerns the researcher's subjective interpretations of the data. This interpretation process is in essence present from the very first interview, and moves through the conduct of the entire IPA method. Field and Morse (1992) describe this as an 'emic' perspective: an exploration of the narrative of participants' internal functioning world, which requires an appreciation and fostering of the client's autonomy to reveal their world under terms of trust and respect.

In the current study, respect for participants' well-being and rights was of paramount importance during interviews and also during analysis and writing up. All participants could access their interview schedule at any time upon request. They were made aware that their anonymity would be safeguarded and that under no circumstances would they be recognisable from the presented data. They were also assured that no potential harm could come to them as a result of their inclusion in the research study, in view of the fact that IPA is concerned with subjectively experienced meaning rather than any specific individual representation. At the same time, it was made clear to participants that any concerns they might have in this area could be raised in the debriefing and follow-up process so that they felt safe and intact.

Bearing in mind the tentative nature of entering into dialogue about such a powerful emotion as anger, I put in place a referral process by which participants could access potential avenues of support, such as counselling and/or psychotherapy.

Every effort to anonymise participant identity was followed. The data collected was encrypted and stored in a secure, locked safe. At such a time when this research is completed all data will be permanently erased.

## **4.8 Reflexive exploration**

Gough (2003, p.23) describes the purpose of reflexivity in the research process as “an attempt to highlight those motivations, interests and attitudes which the researcher has imported to the research and to reflect on how these have impacted on each stage.” As previously discussed, whilst not specifically theorized by Smith et al (Willig, 2001), a reflexive stance has clarified my whole approach to the research process. I was mindful of what I brought to the interview process and subsequent analysis, especially considering the position I occupied as researcher. Working as a therapist allows for the most part a process of creating rapport and connection with clients as the therapeutic endeavour unfolds over a number of sessions. This luxury of time was markedly absent in the single interview session planned for each participant for the data collection. This initially brought with it an element of trepidation. Would I be able quickly to create an atmosphere in the interview where participants felt comfortable enough to open up and divulge their experiences of anger? Would I give them sufficient space to explore the meanings they derived from their narrative?

For me, the participant information sheet provided a means by which I could explain and position the process from start to completion for each participant before the interviews took place. By placing value on this process I was able to show participants the same commitment to ethical awareness as I do my therapeutic clients. This satisfied my concerns about the interview process and participants' welfare.

After the pilot interview I was satisfied that this preparation had worked, in view of the quality of the data and of the meanings that had emerged for the participant. As the interviews progressed I found myself able to allow participants more space to flow with their dialogue. Initially I remained somewhat rigid in relation to my research questions. I wanted to

create a definite space between myself as therapist and myself as researcher, and on reflection I was trying too hard to be role-specific. After the second interview, which was incredibly dynamic and engaging, I passed the metaphorical mantle back to my participants and became more of a guide to their describing and unearthing. This seemed to enable their dialogue to flow more freely, allowing me to use my 'prompt' questions in a more fluid, less mechanistic way. This in turn demanded an intense focus on my own bracketing process, particularly when the atmosphere during interviews became highly charged. Towards the end of the interviews the participants described being surprised at the degree to which they had opened up. I realised that the debriefing and follow-up session, where I checked how the interview had impacted them, was vital for safe and ethical conduct.

Moving into the analysis, I was surprised at the degree to which the interviews had impacted me. In many cases, I had found participants' emotion-charged relating of their stories overwhelming. I sought to move away from the assumptions and understandings that were emerging from within me in order to return to the experience. I was sensitive to the importance of not closing off my awareness but rather applying a reflexive attitude towards it, a dynamic process that Finlay (2008) describes as the 'dance'.

During the analysis stage, I was grateful for the structure provided by Smith et al's (2009) six stage approach (as detailed in this chapter) and the organised focus on the data this afforded me.

## Chapter 5 Findings

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis can be carried out both thematically and idiographically: that is, through the presentation of each participant (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009, p.109).

I begin this chapter by presenting an idiographic, first-person account of each of the six participants' lived experience of anger. Introducing the participants in this way is important, since entering the text and meeting the participant as a whole is fundamental to the process of the hermeneutic circle. It demonstrates the uniqueness of each participant; how they present themselves through their self-metaphors in their lived world as a whole; the meanings they make; and the meaning I am making of their meaning-making. It can help to communicate to the reader an understanding of how participants' unique responses and reactions to the anger emotion unravel in the proceeding themes.

Following this I describe the three main themes that emerged from the analysis of the transcripts: **Anger stirring: The dynamic sensations; Anger unfolding: The transformation of self-awareness**, and **Anger directed: Re-establishing equanimity**. I then explore each theme and related subthemes in greater detail in an attempt to portray how anger is specifically experienced by participants, providing verbatim extracts to illustrate and support the findings.

It should be noted that the main themes both explore the concepts gleaned from the data and show how the process of participants' anger unfolded sequentially from the beginning of their awareness of it to the end of their experiencing it. This does not mean that each theme is



representative of specific ‘stages’ of the anger experience. Rather, it provides an indication of what seemed significant to the participants as they recollected their experiences through examples of being angry.

It is recognised that what emerged from my analysis was intended to address my research questions and as such is one just possible account of the experience of anger. The themes do not cover every facet of the participants’ experience, and were selected due to their relevance to the research questions.

## **5.1 Being the participants**

Whilst the interviews showed similarities within the anger experience of participants, each individual came with their own unique experience of the process of anger and their own perception of anger as an emotion. The following ‘first-person’ descriptions of each participant aim to give a summary of their phenomenological experience of living with anger, including the potential for the anger experience to emerge. They are therefore ontic in their attempt to capture the ‘what it is like’ of individual experience. Following these accounts their processes of the experience of anger are explored. Pseudonyms are used throughout for the protection of participants’ confidentiality.

### **5.1.1 Being Adrian**

I just go through each day trying to be the best person I can. I don’t offend anybody – well, not all the time, and I’m a nice guy, really. Just private and keep myself to myself. It’s easier not to talk about the past really. People just wouldn’t understand, so it’s better just to crack on with life. It’s all helped me be who I am. I know I think about things quite deeply and often I just wander off in my thoughts. Don’t get me wrong, though – I can be as loud as the

rest of them. I just don't get it when people are rude and disrespectful, and hey, don't you ever think I'm an idiot or even treat me like an idiot, because I'm not. I'm no idiot. That just sends me over the edge, and up go the barriers. If you do, then you'll get my wrath, I can assure you. You won't even recognise me if you push me and I lose it.

I just do my thing and all I ask is that you are civil back to me and treat me like I am treating you. Ignorant people, they really get to me, really piss me off. It's really difficult to contain sometimes. I feel like I go from one end of the scale to another. It's the way people speak to me mainly or when they are behaving in an ignorant way. There's just no need for it. I don't ask for that, and I don't deserve it. I just try and do my thing.

It's my stomach where I feel it. It's like a really heavy feeling and then it will go to my fists and I'll clench them. I notice myself getting really worked up and I'll open and close my fists because I really feel it, that heavy feeling. I wonder what my blood pressure is like then because I get light-headed as well when I'm really annoyed. Sometimes, but only when I'm really angry, I'll black out and not remember any of it. I've got control of it, though.

I try and keep it to myself, though. I mean when they treat me like that I wouldn't go and do something stupid, well not always anyway. At work some people can't even just answer simple questions. It's not hard what I ask them, you know. But if they piss me off they'll get my tongue, and I'll tell them what for. It irritates me so much and once I'm off on that track it's hard to come back. I won't go on too much, though. It's better to just get it over with, and usually I get it off my chest and then I'll go out. Maybe I'll have a cigarette and just calm down.

But when I get really angry, like if I have a fight, then I don't even remember it. I get this kind of waking up in the morning feeling but I don't remember what's happened. Well, some of it, like when it started, but nothing when I've flipped, and then I kind of wake up. It's probably a good thing, to be honest. I always say sorry, but it's really to just keep the others happy. It's not really my fault it happens like that and anything could have happened, and I wouldn't know for sure would I, so saying sorry just gets me out of it. They should have seen it coming anyway. I usually try and warn them I'm going to flip. It might happen fast but it takes a lot for me to get there, so they should have known. It's not my fault.

### **5.1.2 Being Dean**

People don't make sense to me sometimes. I'm a very reasonable guy, but they say and do the strangest things. Obviously I'm not like that. I just don't get it. I don't do anything that's not fair and unreasonable but some people just fly off the handle. It's weird to me. I just say it like it is, but I'm not going to take any disrespect from people.

Obviously if somebody isn't being fair then I'll blow up right back at them. I can laugh afterwards when I look back on it, but sometimes I just don't get how people see things. I guess I'll try and see things from both perspectives, though, but often it's best just to get away from the situations, you know. Or just let them have their way. You'll often end up better off anyway.

Whilst I'm getting wound up and angry, the voice just creeps up, you know, and gets stronger and more aggressive like. I know I'm getting stressed then when it's bubbling up inside me. It all just goes round and round in my head and my thoughts, where everything you're angry about just goes round and round but you don't get anywhere. It's weird.

I feel my hands doing more and getting more aggressive and getting tighter. It's mad. I don't know. Sometimes if I've really lost it I'll end up smashing something up but I don't know I've done it. I've just got to get it out, you know. It's scary. People say that anyway, that I look scary. In my face and eyes as well. I mean I'm a big guy also, but I know it's better to take my anger out on something and not somebody. It's better to get rid of the energy, like it's a relief, otherwise you end up just going past a line and then who knows what. It's strange but it just happens. I'm controlling it more these days, though, and it's better to talk about things most of the time, anyway.

### **5.1.3 Being Josh**

I just blow up a lot if you get what I mean. I don't care who's there or what happens but they will get the wrath of my tongue. I'll just really lose it briefly, maybe each day just for a few seconds. It's not as bad as it sounds, though, because it's really just me verbalising it. I'd never get physical so it's not that bad. Just know that if you've made me angry then you've asked for it, and you won't like it. I will give it to you until you've heard me. Sometimes I wear myself out, but I've got to have the last word.

I'm the nicest person, but I just can't tolerate people taking the piss out of me. If you do, then be prepared because I can be really harsh. Sometimes it's a little over the top but if you hadn't pushed me then it wouldn't have happened. If you get it, then that's the way it is.

I'm not the 'easy life' kind of person, me. If it needs to be said I will say it. Often it will build up in my head first and I will get really offensive in my thoughts, saying all kind of things really fast. But I keep it in if it isn't appropriate. It's good to show respect where it's due, but I do overreact sometimes a bit, especially if I'm not shown the right appreciation for the

things I do. That really gets to me, when people don't see that they are in the wrong when I know I'm in the right. I really have to get my point across then and I don't mind shouting people down if necessary. It just makes me feel better and stops the anger when they have finally understood me and got my point of view, like seeing it from my shoes, and they have taken it in. If they don't, I'm just going to keep going on and on until they do.

What I really hate though is when I just have to bite my tongue, like at work with clients. It's easier if I know somebody and I'm able to just go off on one for ages. I can't help it, it's like a rush, and I feel I'm going mad. I've just got to get it out. Once I have then I feel better and I don't hold on to it. It's better to channel it, I think, and anyway I need to let off steam, it's my right. Not all the time, but just for a bit each day and in that moment there's no getting through to me. I can be really arrogant. Others use more colourful language to describe me, but yes, I get quite aggressive and up to the point that I might hit somebody, but I never do. It's only a moment anyway. I rarely get angry.

#### **5.1.4 Being Matthew**

It's hard to talk about, really, I don't really ever talk about it. I did some counselling before, quite a lot of it, but it's still uncomfortable. I don't think it all starts when you're younger. It just builds up over time until you've got to get it out. I mainly get antagonised by people being awkward. I usually ask people so nicely for things, but they just don't hear my point of view and I get really agitated. If it gets to a certain point then I get agitated. I'm nice to start with but then I just get wound up. I'd be much more understanding but some people just get to me and I lose it sometimes, like I'll end up smashing things up or kicking things when I get really frustrated. It gets to me just thinking about it, but I know how it ends up, so it just isn't worth it.

It's the small things that'll wind me up. The big things get to me but I seem to be able to see them more for what they are. The smaller things seem to be worse, like when people can't do what I've asked them or only do a half-hearted job, because I might as well have just done it myself. That really gets to me and I boil up. I start to feel my arms start shaking like there is a pressure building and I really feel like I need to get it out, like lash out at something or someone. I'm learning, though. It's better if I just go out now and calm myself down and clear my head, so I can change my perspective.

I know people don't like me when I'm angry and they often just stay away because they know I might turn on them. I get to the stage where I don't really care, I'll take it out on whatever's around me. I wouldn't even want to be around myself when I'm like that because I can be a horrible asshole sometimes and it feels like I've got a split personality.

### **5.1.5 Being Ben**

Girls are the main reason I get angry. It's when they wind me up and speak to me about other men. Other stuff doesn't get to me because I'm so used to putting up with my Dad at home cracking jokes at me, so I don't get embarrassed. But I get really crazy when girls talk to me and call me names and especially if another guy is involved then I just go into one and start smashing things up and kicking and punching things. I usually get out of there if I can so I can go and calm down. I might drive off or just get away but I go crazy. Otherwise I can end up just falling asleep if it gets really late and then just go off in the morning. That's what happens with the girl I'm with now, but we have a difficult past with things that have happened. It comes up when we argue, and it's usually about other men. I just lose it completely and flip like a switch and can end up doing anything. It's like I lose myself completely and anything can happen. I just don't care anymore.

I can end up head-butting things and even knocking myself out, but at the same time my body will pump up like the Hulk and I'll feel invincible and won't feel any pain in my body at all. I guess that's when I know I'm losing it really. I know when it's happening because I get a shaking all over me and then I've lost it and I go crazy, screaming and everything. When I get to that stage I don't know where to put it sometimes, so on occasions I will take my anger out on my car. I'll throw something at it or just treat it really badly. Thankfully I'm learning to calm down now as I mature. I was a lunatic when I was younger and really violent, but I'm not violent really.

I sound like a nutter, but I'm really easy-going and like to have a bit of banter. People say I look scary and I get it, I mean I'm a big guy. I'm really lucky because my best mate is just the same as me so we can talk about it together and help each other. Sometimes, you see, I just want to break down and cry. I think it's just frustration overwhelming me.

#### **5.1.6 Being Kevin**

I'm normally always calm and collected, and I've tried to be like that as I've grown up, rather than become like my elder brothers who are quite angry. I just didn't want to be like that. I wanted to be more ordinary, so I don't really get angry in front of people. But when I do, I go from being calm, cool and friendly to what people say is pretty scary. It surprises me that they say that but in a way I can understand because I can snap and then start smashing things up, like the Incredible Hulk. I don't like it because afterwards I end up feeling really sad and I find myself going into a real slump. At least the anger subsides then, though. I think it's better to lose control a bit so that can happen.

When I do get angry, I'll end up punching the ceiling, or I'll imagine smashing something up or throwing something like my laptop, which in a way is better or it would end up costing me lots of money. I can feel it in me, the anger, when my heart starts to race and I get a screaming sound in my head and I notice then I'm getting lots of energy, getting tense and wanting to lash out. But because I'm calm I mostly stop myself, as I know I'll also hurt my hands.

So, I can think about it and if I get angrier just the thoughts might get more violent, but it's not worth it mostly. The one thing that really does get to me and aggravate me, though, is being ignored, like when somebody isn't listening to me, or when they hang the phone up on me. That really makes me snap. It happened recently and I ended up punching the steering wheel in my car.

## **5.2 Presentation of themes - An overview**

All participants describe a sequence to the experience of anger. It starts with a perceived attack, throwing them into the experience which always involves an Other, be it a customer at work, a girlfriend, a brother or any person perceived to be acting disrespectfully.

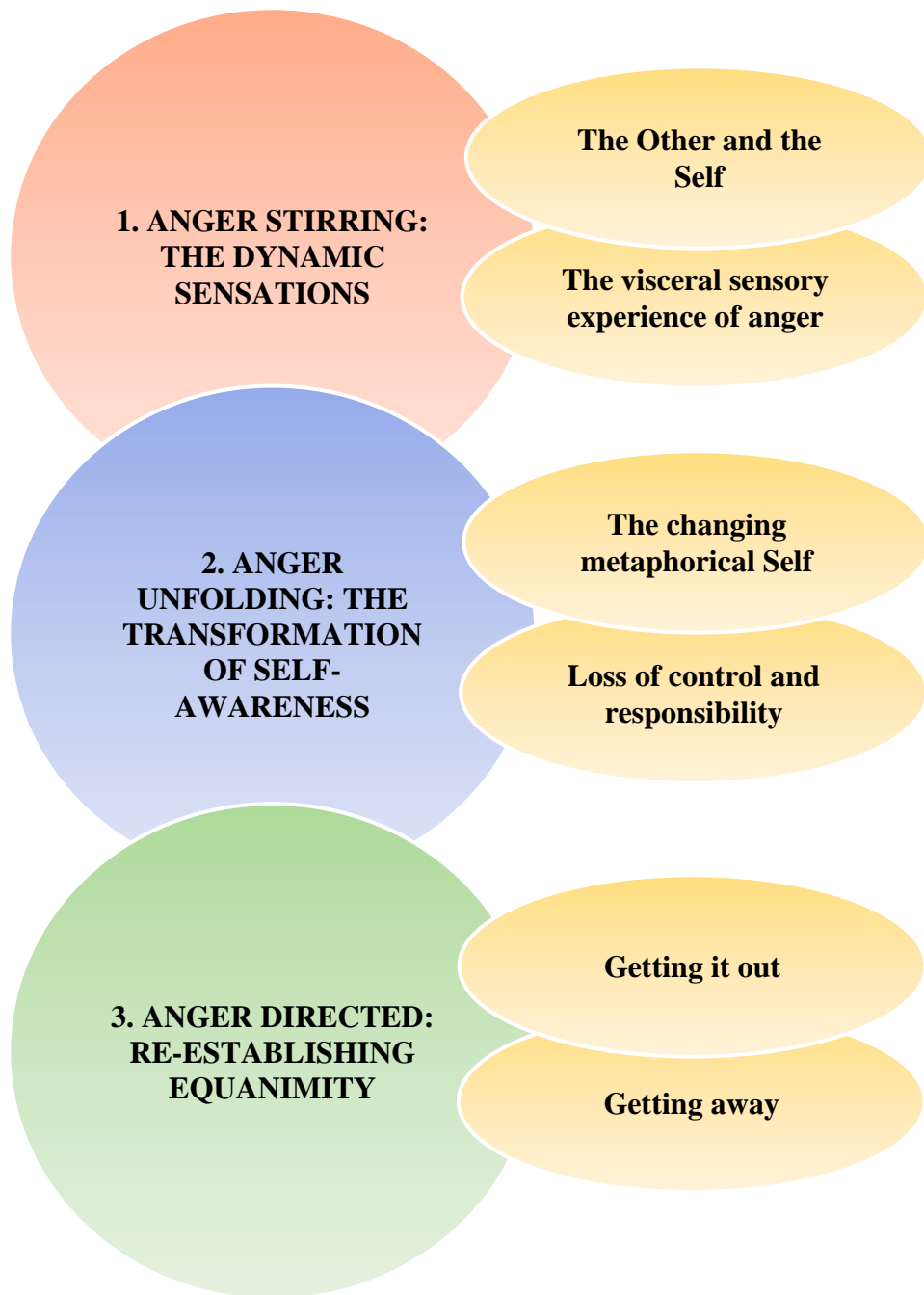
From the initial activation, the process of anger unfolds in a familiar and consistent way for each of them. They know how their anger works. For some participants, the build-up is fast, ferocious and explosive, while for others the pace is more gradual but equally headed towards a dynamic eruption.

Through this external initial trigger, participants become aware of their relationship with the other person present and their sense of self. The encounter becomes a powerful and dynamically physical one. Their bodily experience builds in intensity as they experience



sensations such as tingling, hotness, numbness and shaking until there is an uncontrollable impulse to move and act, to do something. An eruption is inflicted on the world, one which the participants describe through the use of metaphors, bringing alive the potency of the inner experience turning outwards, experiencing a metamorphosis of the self and then losing their sense of self. Since their self is one that is no longer 'them', an action or behaviour takes hold to escape the 'other'. These actions include destroying objects, assaulting others, and themselves, blacking out, or escaping from the situation.

All participants have their own way of bringing themselves back to their own 'status quo' in order to regain control. This is usually done by putting space and time between them and the anger situation. Their descriptions of their lived experience of anger follow a progression through various stages, as demonstrated in the table of superordinate and subordinate themes below (Figure 1):



**Figure 1 - Superordinate and Subordinate Themes**

### **5.3 Theme 1: Anger stirring – The dynamic sensations**

This superordinate theme refers to the participants' experience of becoming angry. For all the participants, there is a clear beginning to this process, an activation of awareness of their anger process and their reaction to it. Two subordinate themes seek to capture more nuanced aspects of this experience: **the Other and the Self**, and **the visceral sensory experience of anger**.

#### **5.3.1 The Other and the Self**

For all participants, it is always someone else's behaviour 'towards' them that 'sets them off'. This could be a customer at work (Adrian), a girlfriend (Ben, Matthew, Kevin), a brother (Dean) or any person seen as being disrespectful (Josh). All the participants blame others for making them angry, thereby enabling them to sidestep the notion of choice and responsibility for their actions. They describe examples with passion and intensity, conveying their incredulity at being treated in such a way, of being under such unmerited attack. This phenomenon appears to be one that connects participants' to their very essence: their self-concept and selfhood (this will be explored in more detail later in this study.)

The trigger of anger for all participants is when they feel somebody is treating them disrespectfully or manifesting unreasonable behaviour towards them. Sensing that they are under attack, they desire to regain control of the situation, which is outside their mode of everydayness and in this process there is an illumination of their biggest fear: that of feeling stupid, inferior or just a 'nobody'. They have a sense of self-diminishing, for this is a place where they can be taken advantage of. Sensing the Other becoming more powerful, they feel a need to redefine themselves as powerful, strong and 'present'.

When asked “Do you remember when and how it [the anger] started?” Dean recalls becoming angry as a reaction to somebody becoming angry with him; for him, being angry back was a natural response: “He got angry and was raring up and shouting and all that, and that obviously made me angry” [Dean, Line 26]. For him, there is an essential, inevitable and instant movement between being the object of the Other’s anger to making the Other the object of his own anger. Dean’s tone and manner as he spoke conveyed the expectation that I would understand his experience and affirm it as normal. There seemed to be no question in his mind that I, too, would have reacted in the same perfectly acceptable way.

Adrian’s anger is triggered by how another person speaks to him, or rather by how he interprets their manner or tone. Once Adrian experiences the Other as ‘pig ignorant’ and ‘difficult’, he perceives them as simply being rude, and this translates to him objectifying himself as an ‘idiot’. As he puts it, “I got pissed off by someone just talking to me like an idiot, being rude and I started swearing” [Adrian, Line 11]. Being positioned in this place of ‘stupidity’ seems to be a recurring pattern in his life. He manifests a strong need to be clearly understood by the Other, for this would act as a release mechanism, freeing him from some kind of cycle and hence his past. He knows this place well and constantly looks to free himself, clear in his understanding of what ignites his anger.

During the interview with Adrian, I asked him what he starts thinking as the anger builds up. I sensed that in asking this question I was perceived as asking him to justify and explain himself for getting angry: in short, I too was perceived as talking to him as if he were an idiot:

*Tom: So it all builds up and then you get angry.*

*Adrian: It’s disrespect. Disrespectful. It gets me, big time. Being spoken to like really rudely. Gale force. Enough said. Being spoken to like I’m stupid as well. That’s sends me, my defences just go straight up.*

Tom: *What do you start thinking?*

Adrian: *That [my question] gets me angry actually [now, in the session he gets angry and agitated in his movement] Yeah, if you talk to me like I'm an idiot. When I know I'm not an idiot [Adrian, Lines 189-195].*

Matthew experiences a build-up inside him as he gets more and more annoyed by how his 'reasonable' (in his opinion) requests for another to do something are not being complied with. His reasonableness has an unreasonable, awkward edge to it, but he needs to make a point and be heard:

*you ask them nicely and then after you asked them nicely a few times you're starting to get wound up ... Inside you just wind yourself up because you think it isn't hard what I'm asking ... So you get more wound up and you get more wound up and then you start kicking the door and then your frustration starts coming out, that's how you end up [Matthew, Lines 30-40].*

For Matthew, there is no wavering from his perception of what is reasonable; asking others to do as he bids is crucial if he is to remain intact. When confronted with the possibility of different worldviews, he is thrown into intolerable disarray. Whatever sense of agency he has fragments and he needs to destroy the initiator of this alternative perception in order to avoid his whole being compromised.

When explaining how anger is triggered within him, Ben is considerably more animated – and certain – than the other participants. He takes immediate 'ownership'. For him, the answer is clear: "it's girls – girls drive me crazy" [Ben, Line 8]. If his partner calls him a name or tells him she has been with another man this will send him spinning. However, Ben also describes a strong family bond or nexus (Laing and Esterson, 1964), one which also generates an incredibly powerful and angry response in him:

*The only time I'd get really crazy angry if it was family, like if it was my brother being chinned [punched] ... my brother could be having a row with fifty men and I'll go running through all of them like a crazy nutter [Ben, Lines 171-176].*

This suggests that Ben's trigger is not exclusively an 'in the moment' experience, related to someone present with him; it can be activated from afar, perhaps when a family member is threatened or disrespected by another person. Even though it might only be hearsay, such information is enough to ignite Ben's anger. His anger is therefore always personal. Even if not actually present, the Other has the ability to engulf Ben's sense of agency, to transcend his sense of self.

Kevin describes becoming angry when "someone doesn't listen when I'm trying to tell them something" [Kevin, Line 123]. He recalls becoming really aggravated during an argument with his girlfriend where she kept hanging up the phone. Not being listened to really gets to him.

This indignant defiance of treatment perceived as unfair was overtly present among all the participants with the exception of Josh. In his case, the trigger is still perceived 'disrespect' on the part of the Other, but he quickly gets immersed in his own analysis of what has just happened. It is almost as though he has become his own attacker; there is less connection with the Other than with himself and his own inner conflict:

*So, I think it's just knowing that my point is out there. It makes me feel better. If someone's saying something and I disagree and it's sort of an argument I need to get my point across and I need to know in my mind that they understand my point of view. Until they know that, I'm angry. The sooner I've got it out and I know they have taken in what I think then I feel better about it [Josh, Lines 86-90].*

### **5.3.2 The visceral sensory experience of anger**

Following this initial interaction with the Other, participants become aware of anger arising within them. Changes in their physical Self begin to react with a dynamic sensory energy in preparation for what may come next.

The ‘physical’ response that stirs up within the participants during the anger experience is an intensely dynamic affair, involving strong visceral sensations in various parts of the body. For some participants it is a sudden experience – a kicking-in or a switch – while for others it builds up like a wave ‘rushing in’. Tension is felt in the hands, along with hotness and numbness, and all this feeds back into the processing and meaning-making of what is happening. Participants are now aware of how physically uncomfortable they feel. It is stifling. This situation evokes biological results, with the body seemingly preparing to propel itself into action. Anger is now becoming a potent, physically embodied lived world experience. The greater the perceived threat, the greater the need for physical preparation for action.

Anger now erupts within all the participants, as if in a release of energy that demands to be spent. While the speed at which this happens varies, the energy has the same intensity and the same need for a direction to move through its cycle.

Dean describes his anger as “bubbling up ... it just creeps up and up and up ... round and round and round” [Dean, Lines 49-57]. It enters his awareness like a whirlwind of emotion, “like this mad adrenaline rush is kicking in” [Dean, Line 64], leaving him unable to catch a breath. As he gets tenser in his body, he notices a change in his voice: “you can hear it [ ] You can feel it bubbling” [Dean, Lines 48-49]. He also notices changes in his hands, which “sort of get more tighter” [Dean, Lines 63-64]. Others around him note that when he becomes angry his eyes change, something he acknowledges in his statement “my eyes open up a lot more and it’s quite strange” [Dean, Lines 89-90].

Josh describes a similar sensation of energy running through his body: “It’s like a rush” [Josh, Line 178]. He also experiences this rush in his tongue, which “comes out of my mouth” [Josh, Line 171]. He experiences a tensing up in his chest which he likens to a pumping sensation: “your blood feels like it’s pumping faster” [Josh, Line 178].

Kevin also draws parallels with his functioning heart: “it’s like a sort of pressure in my chest and ... your heart rate goes up” [Kevin, Lines 154-155]. As the energy builds up inside him, it moves through his chest and up his arms.

Matthew’s arms shake “if it gets to the stage where I’m really, really boiling” [Matthew, Line 91]. For him, anger seems to be felt solely in his arms. The experience “starts off with the shakes” [Matthew, Line 124] before escalating to the upsurge and subsequent explosion.

Adrian describes experiencing a powerful and unpredictable ‘flipping’ into anger, which he likens to a “boom” [Adrian, Line 205]. The ferocity of the anger is “Gale force” [Adrian, Line 191]. He experiences his stomach getting heavier and feels compelled to open and close his hands: “I’ve gotta clench my fists” [Adrian, Lines 105-106]. His “head goes a bit” [Adrian, Line 119], and he becomes light-headed. He recognises that if things build up inside him to such an extent he will black out completely.

Ben describes becoming “crazy angry” [Ben, Line 171]. He uses a metaphor to put across the force of the explosion of anger within him:

*It’s like nitrous on a car. You’ve only got a small tank of it. Your body runs on its normal cylinders but this is like nitrous, like boom ...* [Ben, Lines 243-244].



Ben goes on to describe a physically disconnecting process in which he becomes disembodied: “My whole body goes ... the fear goes and the body goes numb” [Ben, Lines 86, 176]. His body seems to switch off to the experience of potential pain: “It’s the weirdest feeling in the world, not a single bit of pain comes into it” [Ben, Line 96]. His experience is the paradoxical one of having a physical feeling while also feeling numb and detached:

*Completely numb. Do not feel a thing. You don’t really feel the pain, but you get the dizzy effect. I don’t know if you’ve ever been knocked out, but when you do the numbness comes doesn’t it. So I’m nutting my head on the wall but I won’t get the pain of the impact. The brain’s nearly knocked out, but physical pain, nothing* [Ben, Lines 101-105].

Present in all participants’ physical experience is the power with which they feel anger at a sensory level. As the physical energy begins to move dynamically within them they become aware of this impacting their sense of self, and how their self-awareness is held within them.

## **5.4 Theme 2: Anger unfolding – The transformation of self-awareness**

This superordinate theme refers to the participants’ experiences of the anger within them escalating from the initial interaction with the Other and the subsequent dynamic physical stirring. Participants’ descriptions include words like ‘numb’, ‘tightness’, ‘pumping’, ‘boiling’, ‘shaking’, and ‘clenching’ – all dynamic, visceral ‘felt’ experiences which appear to connect the participants with a subjective awareness of their changing sense of self and body.

All participants use metaphorical language to express their anger, looking to capture the intensity that for them cannot be conveyed by literal language. The dynamic movement of the anger bubbling, creeping, going round and round and erupting out of them is all-consuming. There is a need to capture the extraordinarily energetic nature of their anger experience whilst

at the same time clarifying that this inner experience is outside of their control. It is as if they are struggling to retain their awareness of themselves as angry.

The complexities of this theme are explored via two subordinate themes: **the changing metaphorical self** and **loss of control and responsibility**.

#### **5.4.1 The changing metaphorical Self**

As participants' anger moves towards action, an inner transformation takes place, a metamorphosis which creates a formidable being-in-the-world. "I just switch complete personality" is how Adrian puts it [Adrian, Line 215]. Participants describe stepping out of their normal 'selfness'; their character is transformed into a super-invincible force: a 'nutter', 'the Hulk', or someone 'ready to go to war'. Metaphorical language appears needed to describe how they feel like a different person, powerfully charged. This experience is one of detachment, of losing their sense of self along with the ability to see themselves objectively in their own mind. It's as if they have an anger movie running in their mind as they metamorphose into a 'something else'. The choice of metaphor is suggestive of how they judge themselves, or perhaps of what they consider will keep their 'self' safe in the context of the perceived attack.

Both Kevin and Ben speak of how they transform into the "Hulk" [Kevin, Line 254; Ben, Line 86]. For Kevin, there is an inevitability to this metamorphosis, since "if you didn't go uncontrollable you'd stay angry" [Kevin, Lines 231-232]. For him, the image of the "Incredible Hulk" [Kevin, Line 268] appears before he proceeds to smash things up. For Ben, too, this transformation turns him into a "nutter", and he becomes invincible:

*That's why when it switches I feel like I could take on a million men [Ben, Line 61 & 87] ... but my brother could be having a row with fifty men and I'll go running through all of them like a crazy nutter ... and I'll go to war with anyone [Ben, Lines 174-177] .*

Matthew uses self-deprecating language as he describes how he loses touch with his sense of everydayness; he becomes a judge of his changed nature: "I'm a right horrible arsehole ... I'm the most horrible person on the planet" [Matthew, Lines 150-153].

Josh is similarly self-critical, observing that he transforms "from being a really easy-going bloke to being a real prick" [Josh, Lines 257-258]. Dean is aware of his transformation as he is told by others around him that "I look like quite scary" [Dean, Line 84], with changes in his face and eyes seemingly making him temporarily unrecognisable.

The descriptions reveal a participant's 'self' morphing into something they struggle to control. It is as if something then has to change if the previous awareness of self is to be restored. There is therefore a need for some kind of dynamic shift, both physiological and psychological. This is exhibited in the 'character' they become.

#### **5.4.2 Loss of control and responsibility**

All the participants describe losing awareness. Since they are no longer the one about to act, they experience a loss of agency, which quickly moves into a loss of control. Through the words they use and their tone of voice, they reveal a reluctance to take responsibility for what follows. The idea that 'it's not my fault' is prevalent for the parts of the experience they deny being aware of. Through phrases such as 'Really?', 'Oh, sorry!' and 'Oh, no!' they position themselves as innocent newcomers to the situation where 'it' (the anger here takes on a form) is the 'thing' doing the action.

It is as if by not being aware of themselves they can deny what happens and remain blameless, only stumbling upon the consequences of their anger outburst when told of these later. In the aftermath, they describe themselves as being bemused:

*All I can do is say, oh sorry [he sounds and acts insincere, smiling]. Cos I don't remember what I've done, and then you get told what you've done and I'm like, Oh really? [Adrian, Lines 154-155].*

Adrian almost accentuates his apologetic tone, perhaps in an attempt at self-justification: it really isn't his fault because he doesn't remember what has happened:

*That's my saying 'it's not my fault' [he laughs]. It's not my fault, and then I can blame it on someone else [Adrian, Lines 161-172].*

For Adrian there appears to be a clear loss of his sense of agency. There are periods of time that he can't account for, periods he calls the 'middle' of the anger process:

*I remember the before, I remember the after, I don't remember the middle. I was really [he accentuates] pissed off. I remember what caused it and I remember what finished it [Adrian, Lines 136-138].*

He gives a further example of what happens when he 'flips out':

*I remember being told to calm down and I just remember being pushed up against the wall. Apparently I kicked off ... and then I was outside [Adrian, Lines 142-144]. It's not my fault because I don't know what happened or I can't remember what happened [Adrian, Lines 164-165].*

It seems that Adrian experiences moments of losing awareness on a regular basis, something he feels significant for him in his life:

*I zone out a lot. I've got no attention span. I zone out a lot. I don't know if you've [he refers to me] noticed that but I look at the door a lot. Someone actually talked to me for about five minutes and I said 'pardon?' [laughs] [Adrian, Lines 255-257].*

Dean experiences his hands getting tense, which signifies to him that anything he touches will be more aggressive. The feelings of tenseness seem detached from his sense of self and

his physical presence, which appears to surprise him. He also doesn't appear to realise how things quickly build up within him:

*Yeah but my hands get more tense. So if you touch anything it will be more aggressive [Dean, Line 67] ... And your hands, something happens like this period of time and then you think, oh no, I've smashed something up! [Dean, Line 112-113]*

This 'oh, no' has a tone not of regret or remorse but rather of surprise, as if he's just staggered upon a discovery of something all 'smashed-up.' He describes an argument with his brother over a television set:

*and then I went upstairs and sort of started smashing into his door [he looks bemused]. And you don't really know till you've done it. You're walking out and you get more tense and aggressive and then you sort of, it happens and you think, I don't know why I did that [Dean, Lines 70-71].*

Ben describes himself as 'gone' when relating a similar experience of losing awareness and control:

*when I get angry right, I just lose it, like a switch, when I'm proper angry [ ] once I lose it, that's me gone [Ben, Lines 155-157] ... (when) I'm at my craziest [ ] nothing's stopping me [Ben, Line 159].*

While Ben builds up slowly to the point of losing himself in the anger, he appears to view less intense expressions of the experience, such as when he feels 'stressed', 'snappy', or having the 'hump', not as anger but as separate from that emotion and almost as precursors to the 'main event'. The 'real' anger is described as 'proper angry', 'proper' denoting a seriousness not present in his other descriptions. Ben will act (against an individual and/or objects) in order to reassert his sense of self, as if fearing that the Other is taking it from him.

Ben describes a similar experience of 'losing it', this time through sadness and crying:

*all of a sudden [he] get this really sad feeling come over [him] and sometimes I'll even burst out crying over nothing, like I'll be watching a film and it's sad and I'll just wanna cry my*

*eyes out. And I think what the fuck's going on, why am I sad about everything. I'm never sad about anything!* [Ben, Lines 207-211].

He experiences a connection between sadness and anger:

*It's like the other night with her [his girlfriend], I drove off, parked up and sobbed my eyes out for five minutes, and that's it, but it's not I'm sobbing over them, there's just so much anger* [Ben, Lines 165-167].

*Years ago I battered some guy that had chinned my dad [ ] and then I stopped and then I cried my eyes out for about ten minutes* [Ben, Lines 167-169].

This kind of reaction is also present in Kevin's experience. He goes "from anger to sort of sadness" [Kevin, Line 146] and describes his sense of surprise at how others feel scared of him when he is angry, as if it is something that happens out of his awareness. When receiving feedback after an anger experience, his reaction can be "like 'Oh my god!' [laughs]" [Kevin, Line 265], as if it's the first time he's become aware of his impact.

Josh describes losing his sense of agency and feeling helpless as the anger takes hold:

*Like if I've something in my hand it will just go out of my hand* [Josh, Lines 184-184] ... *It's like an anger coming over and you get just, you can't help but do something about it* [Josh, Lines 160-162] ... *It's the feeling of losing control* [Josh, Lines 106-107] ... *But it's that point like when you're doomed, I think* [Josh, Line 193].

However Josh is only out of control for a short period of time: "it will be a ten-second brief experience of not having any control of what I say or even what I do" [Josh, Lines 14-15]. He then plays the whole episode down, reducing it to something acceptable to him:

*So yeah, it's nothing major but it's just sort of every day there's a point where I get angry for about five seconds. And then afterwards I think, yeah, I did overreact* [Josh, Lines 62-63].

While keen to define himself as not an angry person, Josh also wants it to be known that he is still capable of being angry, which indeed is his right:

*I'm not really an angry person but for 23 hours and 59 minutes of the day I'm a happy person, but for that 1 minute of the day, that's where I lose control. So make sure you're not around me for that minute [laughs]. Just walk off, I'm allowed this minute, I'm due this minute [Josh, Lines 244-248].*

Matthew, while appearing to retain greater control over his sense of self, is aware that he would go further if he lost control and acted out his anger:

*I know a lot of people who socialise with me, and if I lose my rag then they just think 'it's not even worth being near him', because if I've lost my rag, even if it was towards something or someone and they try and stop me, they will get it as well. Because at the time as I'm so wound up it don't really matter who it is [Matthew, Lines 137-141].*

However, even when describing himself when angry as 'losing his rag', having a "split personality" [Matthew, Line 149] or "the most horrible person on the planet" [Matthew, Line 153], Matthew has a more mindful awareness. He is alert to the boundaries around his sense of self, and is able to save himself from losing control. For him, "it isn't worth it" [Matthew, Line 48]. He knows his pattern, so escape from the situation is his logical next move.

### **5.5 Theme 3: Anger directed – Re-establishing equanimity**

This superordinate theme refers to the participants' experiences of attempting to regain control of their anger and the actions they take in the pursuit of regaining composure. As they enter the metamorphosis, there is a small window of awareness in which they are able to consider the context of the threat (for example, whether the Other is a girlfriend or stranger, the degree of rudeness, whether they are at work or out with friends) alongside knowledge of the consequence of their actions (will I go to prison or lose my job? What will be the financial cost?). A split second decides what action is to be taken: fight, flight, or in some cases a life-or-death bodily experience. Something has to be done; there has to be some kind of action for the participant's sense of self to re-emerge. Getting 'it' (the anger) out helps re-establish balance and composure.

When the anger experience has played out, the participants exit or escape from the intensity of their loss of self-awareness. Now in a different place, they are able to regain equanimity, re-establish their sense of Self and realise a resolution, both physically and psychologically. This process is explored through the following subordinate themes of **getting it out** and **getting away**.

### 5.5.1 Getting it out

Participants describe their need to get the anger out as something like a compulsion: a plunge into action which comes with their metamorphosis. Action comes in different forms; verbal acting out, often involving the use of profanities; acting out on their own body (for example, biting their own tongue); acting out on an inanimate object (head-butting walls, punching car steering wheels, kicking doors, throwing objects at cars); or acting out on another person. The key objective is to ‘out’ the anger so it no longer swirls within the lived-body-self.

Dean describes directing his anger, where possible, onto some ‘thing’ as opposed to some ‘body’ as he doesn’t want to be defined as a violent person. But he knows he needs to get the anger out if things are to return to ‘normal’ for him:

*if you go past that boundary you need to just do something to get it out of you, so rather than take it out on someone, you take it out on something [Dean, Lines 188-119].*

*I end up doing something else to get it out, that relief, a release of energy, it just comes out and once that’s over then straight away you calm back down again and you’re like oh right, don’t know why I did that, but it worked [Dean, Lines 199-120].*

This is echoed in Ben’s description. As he gets to a certain ‘heated’ degree of anger it’s as if the whole episode sends him into overdrive. He speaks of “smashing the world up [ ] burning the place down” [Ben, Lines 60-61]. There’s no stopping it: something has to take its course,



be destroyed. Having reached this point, Ben targets his anger at things around him, or uses objects to propel the anger away:

*I have to do something, like I know it sounds mad but I nut [head-but] the walls [Ben, Lines 82-83].*

*[and again on a set of wardrobe doors] I was just nutting them like a nutter, like knocking myself out. I just wanted to smash everything [Ben, Lines 94-95].*

*I grab the stereo and just throw it against the wall. Smashed the stereo [ ] threw a chest of drawers over [Ben, Lines 23-25].*

*a lot of anger's taken out on my car, my poor car. I'll wheel spin the granny out of it [Ben, Lines 71-72].*

A sense of frustration is apparent in Ben's account. When there is nothing at hand for him to hit or grab hold of and throw, his attention turns to the person he feels has made him angry. That person is then used to propel his anger away from himself; in the case of his girlfriend, "I had to just push her away from me" [Ben, Line 26]. He seems markedly more in control, with the ability to limit the degree of anger he gets out, as if aware of the consequences of his violent intent.

When Ben acts out his anger on another person, however, this action seems geared more to retribution than to releasing frustration towards regaining his sense of self. It is as if his sense of self is out of alignment and needs resetting by his calculated vengeance:

*by the time I get there I'm on a normal one, and then I just give them a slap as opposed to ripping the shit out of them [Ben, Lines 247-248].*

*I was losing the plot, racing around town trying to find him and couldn't and then a week later I was walking around the corner on a normal day and then saw him and just took him around the corner and just chinned him. So it brought the level right down, so when I look back now I think, sweet, you know he's a prick, there's no need for me to batter him, because he's got the message now and I saved myself getting nicked [Ben, Lines 249-254].*

Matthew describes a similar use of objects around him as a means to disperse his anger, although the choice of object (or person) is less considered. For him, the most important thing is to get the anger out, so as to bring relief from the frustration. Either an object or a person will suffice:

*I got agitated and angry and I started kicking her door in [Matthew, Line 17].*

*You get more wound up ... and then your frustration starts coming out [Matthew, Lines 38-39].*

*Just to relieve the anger out of me I'll take it out on anyone and anything [Matthew, Line 141].*

*When it starts off with the shakes [in his arms] then when I do let off with my anger it's normally on something or someone, I normally end up just lashing out or something, like if I'm working on the car then its normally the side of the car gets redecorated or that person gets hurt [Matthew, Lines 124-127].*

Kevin also describes 'lashing out' at his car:

*I rang her and she kept putting the phone down on me. And that is just one thing that gets to me, and then I lashed out and I was punching the steering wheel [Kevin, Lines 114-116].*

The ceiling is another target:

*I actually do lash out and like punching the ceiling and just carry on and you don't think 'stop', you just do it and you carry on until [ ] you lose your energy or you can't be bothered [Kevin, Lines 222-224].*

Adrian vents his anger via verbal tirades: "I started swearing for like the next 20 seconds at least" [Adrian, Line 34]. The example he cites took place at his place of work, where getting physically aggressive was not an option for him. He describes blacking out when reaching a certain intensity of anger, but this response appears out of his control, rather than a chosen method of getting his anger out:

*if you push it then I just black out from it and then afterwards I just calm down and start coming back to it [Adrian, Line 129-130].*

Josh restrains himself from letting his anger out in work situations as he knows this would put his job at risk. Biting his tongue instead seems to bring him within himself again. Outside of work, however, he describes a verbal venting of anger similar to that described by Adrian:

*I'm not the sort of violent person when I'm angry, but I'll say things, in the heat of the moment, it doesn't matter who's there, or what it's gonna mean afterwards, I'll just come out with something and it will be a ten second brief experience of not having any control of what I say or even what I do, yeah, but to this point it always verbal instead of physical ... [Josh, Lines 12-16].*

The need to 'get it out' is followed by a need to escape the scene of the situation, as if to shift the horizons of the self and thereby help drive the anger out of participants' experience.

### **5.5.2 Getting away**

Even during their loss of agency in the anger experience, participants appear to hold a glimmer of what will help them regain control and balance. At some point there is a movement within them towards reclaiming themselves and their sense of agency. In this process, there is awareness that they can act upon the situation, the beginning of some conscious control over what is happening and what they are doing. For most participants, this leads to a need to get away from the situation and from what has just occurred. They appear aware that space and time will enable the intensity of the experience to subside and allow them to find themselves again.

Adrian recognises that when he gets angry he can potentially remove himself from the situation; for example, at the office he might go outside to have a cigarette or leave for an appointment. This 'getting out' strategy is echoed by Matthew:

*I go for a walk and clear my head, in about an hour or so I've calmed myself down. I normally come back and I'll be fine. I have to go out to sort of calm myself down [Matthew, Lines 110-112].*

Dean, is also aware of escaping from his anger experience by creating spatial and temporal distance:

*Yeah, just getting away from it basically. Just got away and just calmed it all down a bit. And eventually it just resolves itself after a while [Dean, Line 41].*

Ben, too, appears to have an understanding of time as providing space for his anger to dissipate:

*If you can put time between you and the issue you want to sort out, the target, because in my head I'm flying down there and by the time I get there I'm on a normal one [Ben, Lines 245-246].*

Like Adrian, Matthew and Dean, Ben also strives to get away. Telling of how he “drove off” [Ben, Line 27], and how he “rode off on his ped [moped]” [Ben, Line 168], he seems to appreciate the value of putting space between him and the ‘anger’ scenario. As he puts it, “it’s a distance thing” [Ben, Line 242]. Ben’s descriptions suggest that even when in the throes of ‘crazy anger’, he retains an inbuilt ‘exit strategy’:

*I had to just push her away from me, obviously, she was screaming and shouting and then I left and then I started to have a crazy one outside, drove off and that was it [Ben, Lines 26-28].*

It appears that getting away from both from the moment and the Other, and putting physical space and time between them and the situation, allows the participants to exit from the anger experience into a place where they are able to find themselves again and rationally explore what has happened.

Josh, however, describes a different kind of expectation. Rather than leave the situation, he remains steadfast in his stance. He will not change his position, and in the moments when he is overwhelmed by his anger feelings, it is the Other that he expects to leave. It could be

argued, however, that the departure of the Other from the situation creates the same result: that of distance.

*for that 1 minute of the day, that's where I lose control. So make sure you're not around me for that minute [he laughs]. Just walk off, I'm allowed this minute, I'm due this minute [Josh, Lines 246-248].*

Kevin is the only participant not to describe these spatial and temporal aspects. For him it is more about an internal distancing process, a 'slumping down' which enables the anger to dissipate or leave:

*You sort of just slump down and then you go from being angry to [ ] sad. And then it's all just relaxed and it's like a, I don't know, it just all slumps down [he laughs] and then it's all gone [ ] It's like it's just gone somewhere else [Kevin, Lines 211-215].*

## **5.6 Summary**

Anger appears to be experienced through a cycle that holds certain common characteristics. In becoming aware of one's sense of self in relation to another person in the anger scenario, strong visceral sensations are experienced throughout the body, often with the same kind of dynamic movement. As the anger moves through the body there appears a changing sense of self, followed by a loss of awareness and control in which the notion of responsibility is subsequently rejected. Anger is mostly expressed outwards, onto objects or other people. Following this there appears a desire to get away from the situation in order to take time to regain calm and composure. This transient cycle of anger follows the same process regardless of the duration of the anger episode, which can range from ten minutes to a few hours.

## **5.7 Reflexive exploration**

Whilst I used the thematic analysis (TA) method in my master's dissertation, this was my first endeavour using a phenomenological methodology of investigation and analysis. I began by typing up the interviews, which enabled me to listen again to the words the participants

had chosen to recount their experiences of being angry. Hearing the participants' changing tonality as they revisited the anger experience brought their words alive. This was also an exciting process and helped me take my awareness of the participants' discourse to another level.

When transcribing interviews, I became aware of my own reactions, often signalled by my own tonality. I noticed a certain dryness in my stance which in retrospect was indicative of the importance I had placed on the interview process. I felt somewhat disappointed that I had not engaged more fully with the participants' flow through my questions, but at the same time relieved at having escaped from the confines of the interview process, which had felt somewhat restrictive.

Listening again to the process enabled me to apply more time and reflexive thought to what was being described. As I became more conscious of the power of participants' words, I began to experience an intensity within me that seemed to mirror to some degree the intensity I had experienced from the interviewees. This was noticeable to me as it felt like the first time I had been moved by the Other: the participant. This led me to notice the distinct context in which I had placed the 'conduct' of interviews.

During the analysis I recorded observations of a theoretical and conceptual nature and included my thoughts and feelings, all of which facilitated greater reflective awareness of the data. Informed by the process that my previous thematic analysis prescribed, with its emphasis on pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns or themes within the data, I had thought myself well prepared to undertake an IPA study. However after immersing myself in the process and becoming more appreciative of both the hermeneutic and interpretive nature

of IPA when compared with TA, I began to feel a little overwhelmed. I struggled to juggle the iterative process of the analysis and keeping as idiographically close as possible to the participants and their description with my own reflexivity, toiling to find insights in the interpretation of the data while managing my own internal thoughts, feelings and pre-understandings. After a time, however, I began to feel a curious sense of comfortableness. I now recognised that this juxtaposition was indeed necessary; it helped me move deeper and more freely into the phenomenological aspects of the participants' experiences, while steering me away from a mechanistic way of being with the process. It eased me towards a 'curious' state of being in relation to participants' descriptions, enabling me to immerse myself in their words and gain a sense of connectedness with the process.

This brought me to writing the analysis of the interviews, which was one of the most challenging aspects of the whole study. As I began writing up, I found myself becoming overwhelmed by exhaustion, to the extent that I could only manage to write for one to two hours at a time. Waves of tiredness forced me to shut down by falling asleep, something I initially fought against. After a while I realised that this was symptomatic of connecting with the intensity of the dynamic material and of my struggle and desire to remain faithful to the IPA process.

As I immersed myself in participants' accounts of their emerging stages of anger, I felt as though I were reliving the power of the emotion whilst at the same time attempting to conceptualise what was happening for the participants, all the time striving to bracket (as much as is possible) my own biases, preconceptions, pre-understandings and presuppositions. The complexity of this process and its impact on me, both psychologically and physiologically, took me by surprise. I became aware of the intricate differences between

this process and my previous thematic analysis. I could see how IPA was taking me closer to the essence of the participant's lived phenomenological world – and my own.

In the process of analysis, I became aware that each case might be influencing my worldview and changing my horizons slightly. I therefore set about completing each participant's analysis from start to finish before moving on to the next. This proved harder than I at first thought. With each participant's analysis, however, I found myself able to immerse myself more quickly and deeply, as if my awareness was preparing for this submerging to occur.

Once I had completed the initial analytical phase for all participants, my awareness of how each analysis was taking me deeper into the anger experience compelled me to undertake several more rounds of analysis. I did this to gain a deeper overall understanding which might reveal comparative elements between participants. During each round of analysis, I sought to consider my own reflexive awareness of the data, as well as the 'dance' (Finlay, 2008) involved in bracketing my pre-understandings. My aim was to come to each round of analysis as unbiased as possible so that I could give each participant's account the space it deserved, whilst acknowledging what I brought to the process.

This analysis and re-analysis was both challenging and exciting. I found getting inside the phenomenon of the participants' anger both exhausting and fascinating, especially in view of my research questions. A further challenge was that of deciding what aspects of participants' accounts showed up across all cases. This was an area where once again I encountered complexity in the interpretive and reflexive process. While committed to retaining each participant's unique experiences, I was aware that commonalities between cases were presenting themselves. I then had to decide whether such commonalities formed a theme. As



the themes moved towards being finalised, each taking on a new identity, I began to experience a curious sense of relief from the responsibility of undertaking this process in a reflexive way.

As I completed the analysis I felt a deep appreciation of the rich, complex process that IPA offered me during this analysis of my participants' lived phenomenological worlds. I was also conscious of my own responsibility to remain faithful to the interpretive process in conjunction with my own reflexivity. Finally, I felt appreciative of the idiographic element of IPA as it helped me retain the participants' throughout the process and in doing so made exploring the phenomenon of anger a more real and human endeavour.

## **Chapter 6 Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to gain a rich, in-depth understanding of the lived experience of anger in young men. Semi-structured interviews with six participants were employed to gather the data, which was then analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Three superordinate themes (with attendant subthemes) emerged through a double hermeneutic engagement with the participants' accounts.

In this chapter I begin by discussing the findings of this study in relation to the existing literature. I then engage in a critical reflexive evaluation of the strengths and limitations of my chosen methodology and method, before addressing issues relating to the validity and quality of the research. I then explore the implications of the research for clinical practice, following which I suggest future possible avenues of research. I end the chapter with a reflexive exploration of my experiences during the writing of the chapter.

### **6.1 The findings in relation to the literature**

The findings of this study lend support to some aspects of the extant literature while extending the perspective through the use of an existential phenomenological lens. In the discussion which follows, it should be noted that reference is made to literature which was not presented in the initial literature review. This is the result of themes emerging that were not anticipated by the interview schedule. As Smith et al (2009, p.113) note, "it is in the nature of IPA that the interview and analysis will have taken you into new and unanticipated territory."

In this section I show how each of the six subthemes which constitute my findings both complements and extends the findings of earlier research. The six subthemes are: i) The

Other and the Self; ii) The visceral sensory experience of anger; iii) The changing metaphorical self; iv) Loss of control and responsibility; v) Getting it out; and vi) Getting away. In the discussion which follows, the final two subthemes are explored together.

### **6.1.1 The Other and the Self**

The experience of anger reported by the young men participating in this study always begins with the involvement of another person. It is someone else's behaviour towards them that 'sets them off'. That individual could be a workplace customer, a girlfriend, a brother, or any person considered as disrespectful to them. The men's awareness of anger is triggered when they perceive the Other as not doing what is expected of them, which the men equate to an attack on their ideas about what is right or wrong.

Behaviours are considered rude or offensive if they seem disrespectful of the young men's values or point of view, or if the men feel they are being ignored. Participants become immersed in their own perspective as they become angry. They describe what they see as unjust behaviour towards them with passion and intensity, bemused that they have been treated in such a way and with an incredulous sense of being under unmerited attack. This is echoed in Ekman's (2003) insights into anger as discussed in the earlier literature review, where anger is elicited when one is trying to hurt us psychologically, and where disappointment is felt in others' treatment of us.

For the young men there is an assault on their sense of self that they cannot comprehend, and which they need to correct. These reactions highlight from the earlier literature review Novaco's (1975) ideas around the importance of how someone interprets an experience, how anger is recognised, expressed and controlled and how there may be errors in communication

with others. Additionally, as discussed earlier (Ellis, 1973; Beck, 1976; Lazarus, 1991; Schachter and Singer, 1962), the relationship between how somebody interprets an event and the anger they experience is relative.

The men's stance remains fixed until the Other backs down, or until they themselves amend their own position in order to return to a 'right' position where they have understanding of what is pushing them into anger. However, once the emotion kicks in they become locked into their own immovable thoughts, perceptions and processes.

These findings are congruent with those of Thomas et al (1998), who also found that anger was generated for their study's female participants within their close relationships. A mother, child, friend or significant Other was perceived to have let them down or, conversely, to have expected too much of them. Confusion around the participants' understanding of Others' behaviour, eliciting feelings ranging from 'hurt' to 'righteous indignation', was also evident among Thomas et al's (1998) participants, who perceived Others as being in disrespectful violation of their values, morals and principles.

Thomas (2003) and Rivera (2006) also found participants' anger triggered by the actions and behaviour of others. Similar judgements were made by participants about not being listened to, being taken advantage of, or not being taken seriously. The perceived incompetence of the Other was also mentioned, as in the current study. Judgements of how the other 'ought' to behave and what constituted 'right' and 'wrong' were reported, as was participants' desire to put right perceived 'wrongs' against themselves or others, although 'right' and 'wrong' were more closely related to the participants' judgement of their own behaviour than to the behaviour of others.

Thomas (2003) found that her male participants' anger was also related to functionally failing inanimate objects. This was not mentioned as a trigger of anger by the young men in the current study. Indeed, those participating in the current study did not appear to have any emotional connection to inanimate objects; rather, objects such as telephones, stereos, cars, doors and pieces of paper became useful objectified *aids* to the expulsion of anger.

Eatough and Smith (2006a), Eatough et al (2008) and Eatough (2009) reported similar findings in respect of their female participants' anger experiences, which again seemed to be triggered within intimate relationships. However, they found that it was not always necessary for another to be present for an anger episode to occur. Whilst their participant narratives described the anger experience as springing from a dialogue with, say, a mother, mother-in-law, partner or child, the actual origin of the anger stems from their internal negative judgements of their angry reaction, as opposed to the others behaviour, which appears different to the current study's participants. The issues of disrespectful behaviour and participants' need to be right are also not as evident as they are in the current study.

This study confirms the view of existing research that the anger experience is generated by the presence of another person whose stance or behaviour does not meet a predetermined set of beliefs or expectations. The study extends the literature by providing in-depth descriptions of how the actions of the Other are perceived, understood, judged and reacted to. This study also extends the literature by considering the lived experience of young men living in the United Kingdom, which to date has not been researched. At present, research relative to the experience of anger in men is limited to a study conducted in the USA (Thomas, 2003).

The concept of the 'Other' resonates with phenomenology, and in particular the notion of intersubjectivity. For Husserl (1989), intersubjectivity pertains to the condition whereby I

maintain that the world as it presents itself to me is in harmony with the same world that presents itself to you, and that if you were present in my place you would see it the way I do and I would see it the way you do. This is captured in the therapeutic encounter through the notion of empathy, or *Platzwechsel*, the ‘exchange or trading of places’, which Husserl (1989, p.177) describes as the situation where “each person has, at the same place in space, ‘the same’ appearances of the same things.”

For the young men in this study whose anger has been ignited, the idea that one can move out beyond the original intersubjective position, adjusting to an appreciation that the Other is experiencing things differently is hard to grasp. The separate mutual existence of the Other becomes intolerable. Thus the positioning of the Other within their own separate space needs to be somehow disregarded as they find they cannot adjust to it; participants experience the Other in behaving as they are doing and not perceiving the situation as they do as incredibly exposing. There is a disruption in the position held, thus a disruption within the intersubjective harmony. There is a building up of pressure within this experience as the young men cannot escape the experience of the Other and try to correct the intersubjective position by being ‘right’. The situation is no longer shared as ‘real’ and there is no longer a potential “we”, it has become ‘I’ and a separate ‘You’. Participants have a vested interest (or ‘care’) in maintaining their point of view and position; it feels crucial to their very existence.

Heidegger (1962/1927) describes this ‘care’ as being present in Dasein, the ‘being there’ manifestation of existence. This is illuminated in the young men’s fight to maintain their position of authenticity; within the intersubjective experience with the Other. They care deeply about a sense of congruence with their personal truth. This poses the question that if

the Other doesn't change their position of the situation to match their own, what becomes of their 'being there'?

In the current study Josh describes this process well. Following his initial reaction to what he considers an insult, he appears thrown into a place where his primary objective is to correct the Other's point of view so that it matches his own. He *needs* to know that they have shifted their position to align with his own. Until this shift in the Other has taken place, Josh *cannot* stop being angry, for to do so would be incongruous. If he doesn't achieve this shift within what he sees as the originator of the anger experience (the Other), he will seek it elsewhere. After one such incident Josh returns home, explains to his mother what has happened with the 'Other', and awaits her agreement with his stance of being 'wronged'. If she doesn't agree, he then continues his quest for his point of view to be accepted, assigning his mother the role of antagonist until such a time that she wholeheartedly agrees with his perspective.

The notion of 'care', viewed by Dasein as inherent in the intersubjective state, is evident in how all the young men react to the 'Other' in the initial phase of the anger experience. It is as though there 'should' be for them an inherent 'mutual respect and understanding', maintaining the same intersubjective position which for these participants appears fixed. If this is not experienced as accepted by the other person there is a potentially ambiguous intolerable situation within them. The Other *has* to be able to change and self-correct and should care enough about them to make this happen. If they don't: *You don't care, so I will make you care, because I care about being cared about.* For the young men in this study, this is the only path to resolving the Other's perceived 'wrong' towards them.

The notion of the 'Other' within the interpersonal relationship is also referred to by Sartre (1943), who distinguishes between 'being-for-itself' (with a conscious awareness of and presence *to* itself) and 'being-for-Others' (being in relation to those we encounter in the world, with their perceptions and conceptualizations of us over which we have no control). Within the mode of 'being-for-itself', the 'Other' exists not only as an object but also as a subject, capable of reducing us to the status of an object in *their* world, as we are able to do to them. Herein lies the complex relationship between object and subject for these participants, where there is a lack of awareness and acknowledgement of each other being able to move between subject-object and potentially coexist with free consciousness (although for Sartre this is an impossible goal). The participants describe the perception and intolerable experience of being turned purely into an object, where their freedom is lost. There is thus a powerful desire to appropriate the others subjectivity, to dominate them by reducing *them* to an object. Within this they will become free, fulfilling the lack of for-itself. This can lead to conflict within the interpersonal relationship, a scenario famously referred to in Sartre's 1944 play *No Exit*, the closing line of which ends "Hell is other people": the notion that our knowledge of ourselves is ultimately judged in the light of the judgement of the Other, which appears so pertinent for these young men.

This interplay between object and subject can be seen in the anger experience of Adrian as he talks to a customer over the phone. He gets angrier as the customer refuses to answer his questions (he is positioned thus as an object), when all he is trying to do is help them with the information they have asked for. Adrian maintains he is just trying to do his job and when he finally has had enough of the way the Other has objectified him, he moves the Other from being the subjective antagonist ( "*you're just being plain rude to me when I'm not being rude to you*" [Adrian, Lines 65-66]) into an objectified source of income ( "*well you're not gonna*



*make me any money, so what's the point in going on*" [Adrian, Lines 95-96]). It is this very objectification that makes the Other's presence an alienating one and looks to give him freedom. However, as Sartre (1956, p.198) writes, "By the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgement on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other."

Ben describes a situation where he and his partner are arguing:

*Like when she was slapping me, she was going some and I was not even noticing it, and I was holding her by the throat and she's just going bang, bang, bang [hitting him] and I just pushed her away...* [Ben, Lines 87-90].

Despite being hit repeatedly where Ben is turned into an object, he is seemingly unaware of the attack on him. Then he becomes a 'being-for-itself', with the conscious awareness *to* itself that then initiates the action of pushing away his partner.

Another, more passive example of the object-subject relationship can be seen in Josh's narrative. As he becomes angry, he starts to verbalise his thoughts to his female co-worker, the object of his anger: "I sort of said 'what is her fucking problem?'" [Josh, Line 38]. He then moves into his own subjective view of the kind of woman he perceives her as: "I didn't swear at her 'cos she's a woman, an older woman" [Josh, Lines 51-52]. Here in moving the woman into an object position, Josh is in fact able to refine his own subjective position and his anger experience.

This interplay is inherent in the young men's experiences of anger in relation to the Other. There is a point at which, as the anger stirs and erupts within them, they come face-to-face with themselves and this opens them up to the notion of self-centredness, which Van Deurzen-Smith (1997) posits as an inherent and fundamental aspect of our humanness, born

of our orientation to our assumption of right and entitlement, both of which are geared towards our survival.

This study extends the literature by showing how, in the anger experience, young men paradoxically experience a state of disengagement from others while at the same time being connected to and unable to separate from the Others. There is a rejecting of the Other and yet retaining of a sense of care for the Other from within the intersubjective state. It reveals the impossible tussle between needing to be right at all costs and desiring mutual and reciprocal congruence and authenticity.

### **6.1.2 The visceral sensory experience of anger**

As the young men enter into the anger experience they begin to become aware of the physical aspect of the emotion they are feeling. They describe a variety of sensations in different parts of their body, including rushing, tightening, tensing, pumping, building, shaking, boiling, clenching and numbing. They also experience pressure, hotness, dizziness and blacking-out.

One participant sees his anger “bubbling up” [Dean, Line 49], creeping upwards and going round and round like an engulfing vortex with a force that has to explode at some point. This winding-up process becomes all-encompassing, with the eventual release described by another participant as “all hell lets loose” [Adrian, Line 182].

The sensations the young men experience vary in the speed with which they build up. While some participants experience a slow, wave-like build-up, others undergo a more sudden, uncomfortable shift, as if a force has taken control of their body. This latter experience is echoed in the detached language used to describe it; it is as if the emotion is taking on a life

of its own. Josh's rush of anger "comes out of [his] mouth" [Josh, line 171], and he describes what happens as if from a second person perspective: "your blood feels like its pumping faster" [Josh, Line 178]. So, too, does Kevin: "your heart rate goes up" [Kevin, Lines 154-155]. Similarly the young men describe parts of them 'going' somewhere else, as though that part is separating from their body: "My head goes a little bit" [Adrian, Line 119]; "My whole body goes" [Ben, Line 86].

Such descriptions find their echo in what Lakoff (1987) describes as 'folk theories': four commonly held beliefs about how anger is physiologically experienced. These are: (i) increased body heat; (ii) increased internal pressure (blood, muscular); (iii) agitation; and (iv) interference with perception.

The findings of this study also concur with those of Thomas et al (1998) and Thomas (2003), whose participants described intense bodily sensations during the anger experience. In Thomas et al (1998), participants described sensations of simmering, stewing, festering, and searing as they tensed up with the anger building inside them. However, the descriptions appear to be less dynamic and more controlled than those in the current study. Participants describe holding and containing the anger in their body by gritting teeth, clenching jaws, holding tears back, and holding the body rigid. One participant sought to 'shrink' in order to cope with the anger. Such findings appear to contradict the experience of the young men in the current study, whose physical experience includes sensations flowing through them and out of them. In their case, the anger is clearly visible, unlike the woman in Thomas' (2003, p.315) study who did not want to "make it public."

Eatough and Smith (2006a) also describe their participants as experiencing intense feelings of bodily change, such as trembling, boiling and getting hot. These feelings are described as swamping and engulfing, as if controlling the participants. As in the current study, the anger event also typically contains dissociative episodes in which participants' thoughts, emotions and actions appear separate and functioning independently.

Eatough et al (2008) and Eatough (2009) provide further descriptions of bodily sensations in various parts of the body (face, head, heart area) during the anger experience. Their participants described feeling hot, shaking, and experiencing intense pressure akin to boiling. This would build up to the point where the bodily sensations seemingly took over. Participants described their vision misting over with redness, in line with the experience of the young men in the current study.

This study supports the findings of existing research that during the experience of anger there is an intensely dynamic experience within the body and that the feelings generated by the anger emotion enable the emotion to progress through the body. The study extends the literature by providing rich, in-depth descriptions of the type of bodily sensations young men have during the process of anger. These descriptions suggest that such bodily sensations are geared primarily to getting anger in motion towards the goal of letting it out (as opposed to controlling it). Once again, this study extends the literature by exploring the lived bodily experience of young men based in the UK.

Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002, p.211) describes the body as “a power of natural expression.” He sees it as the origin of expressive movement, which impacts one's actions and perceptions of the world. It is through the body that we have access to the world. Meaning is lived through

bodily experience and action. In this sense it can be seen that through their physical experience the young men become aware of themselves and the situation as they experience and describe (and reflect on) their conscious bodily sensations. As these sensations come more to the fore of their experience, they access more of their perceptions around the sensations they are experiencing and of the perceived situation. It's an ever increasing cycle of affirming their physical angry sensations in their body (and thus the inescapable situation) that then is reflected back upon, them becoming even angrier about feeling/experiencing their anger and the situation. This process moves them to a detached perception of their internal sensations in terms of their descriptions of involuntary movements and parts of them moving away elsewhere.

Damasio (2000) proposes that there is no evidence that we are conscious of *all* of our feelings. In the research some of the participants talked about bursting into tears and feeling sad once the anger has subsided, but they appeared unaware of any other feelings during the anger experience. They are simply angry. However this is not to say that those feelings have not been present. As Damasio (2000, p.36) elaborates, "Neither the feeling state nor the emotion that led to it have been 'in consciousness', and yet they have been unfolding as biological processes." He describes this unfolding process in terms of three stages:

*a state of emotion*, which can be triggered and executed nonconsciously; *a state of feeling*, which can be represented nonconsciously; and *a state of feeling made conscious*, i.e., known to the organism having both emotion and feeling (Damasio, 2000, p.37).

As applied to the current study, the third state of feeling *made conscious* is when participants are able to access the dynamic sensations they are experiencing and describe them. Damasio (2000, p.51) brings alive the visceral, as well as the functional, regulating nature of emotion when arguing that "emotions use the body as their theatre, but emotions also affect the mode

of operation of numerous brain circuits.” The simmering, stewing, festering, searing, and tensing sensations described by participants signify a movement into consciousness of the emotion that is happening within them. We hear the language of anger.

Damasio (2000) concurs. Language, he argues, “is a translation of something else, a conversion from non-linguistic images ... Language is a major contributor to the high-level form of consciousness which we are using at this very moment” (pp.107-108).

In this sense the descriptions of bodily sensations present in the young men’s narratives are how they *speak* their anger. They are the words that account for what Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) calls their ‘lived body’: the body as experienced by them, manifesting itself to them as their possibilities of acting in the world.

This study therefore adds to the literature by illuminating the profound intensity of the physiological sensations within the anger experience. It shows how these sensations dynamically build up, giving the young men greater access to their self and the immediate situation that they find themselves in. It identifies a cycle where the more the physiological sensations increase, the more awareness/access of themselves and the situation they have (body, self and situation are inseparable). It highlights that through this cycle the intensity becomes unmanageable, with the young men detaching from their embodied self.

### **6.1.3 The changing metaphorical self**

Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002), considered by Lakoff and Johnson (1999, p.xi) as the originator of their notion of the ‘embodied mind’, refers to the role metaphor plays in cognition. His view of the senses as interrelated aspects of human bodily engagement with the world

highlights how attempting to describe a bodily sensation often leads individuals to use a mixture of senses to explain how they are feeling. This view is supported by Cazeaux (2002), who explains (for example) how sound and colour can be used together to describe and organise our phenomenological world, as in “the sound of a trumpet is scarlet” (p.4). The idea that metaphors relating to anger capture the essence of how abstract concepts are cognitively represented is now widely accepted (Lakoff, 1987; Gibbs, 1994; Kövecses, 2000). Wilkowski et al (2009) show the importance of the communicative essence of metaphor for children in understanding the differences in various emotional experiences that would be difficult to communicate via literal language alone.

From the position of the visceral physical experience moving within them, participants in the current study begin to describe a representative image of their anger, and of ‘them’ as angry. Their words convey the outward movement of their anger so as to quantify its power. They use terms such as ‘boom’, and ‘gale force’ to paint a picture. One participant uses the powerful analogy of a car running with a nitrous oxide conversion to its carburettor, which gives the car an instant surge of power that far exceeds the engine’s original design. Other descriptions offer a more personified essence, such as going ‘mental’, becoming a ‘nutter’ or going ‘crazy angry’, thereby suggesting a step outside reality, psychological stability and normal everyday behaviour. There is no mistaking the power of what is happening: a transformation of participants’ world.

Within this transformation the young men experience a rapidly changing sense of self. They transform into something different, where their way of being in the world blends with a different set of values and meanings. The young men experience what Gadamer (1997) describes as a ‘fusion of horizons’. Their body size, strength, and colour all undergo

significant change as they morph into someone else, like the character of the ‘Incredible Hulk’, a character whose ripped clothing signifies his metamorphosis into a larger, entirely new, maddened personality (something Adrian describes happening within him). This transformation into a powerfully strong and big being enables the participants to inhabit a body that possesses more power than before. It enables them to believe they can achieve an omnipotent position in which they can “go to war with anyone” [Ben, Lines 176-177] and “take on a million men” [Ben, Line 61].

Participants’ view of this new super-potent being they have become is not always positive. While Matthew describes himself as becoming “a horrible asshole ... the most horrible person on the planet” [Matthew, Lines 150-153], Josh calls himself in this state “a real prick” [Josh, Line 258].

The findings of the current study differ in important respects from those of Thomas et al (1998), whose women participants described their anger experiences as diminishing their control and impacting their sense of self in such a way as to make them ‘shrink up’. While the women reported similar physical sensations and described themselves as crazy, ugly or mean, this appeared a more cognitive process, involving their efforts to inhibit their anger so as not to upset others. Absent from Thomas et al’s (1998) participants as a whole was any powerful metaphorical representation of them becoming and being angry. They appeared to remain firmly in ‘themselves’.

However, the findings of the current study are congruent with those of Thomas (2003), where the male participants used metaphors to describe their anger: for example, phrases such as ‘runaway horse’ and descriptions such as fire, flood, eruption and vortex. One participant



described his anger as an ‘infiltrator’ that *made* him respond, while another likened it to a ‘robber’ that took on a life of its own and acted through its own volition.

Eatough and Smith (2006a and 2006b) similarly found participants using terms such as ‘pressure cooker’ to describe the build-up of anger. Participants also described transforming into a different state, one they called ‘wild’ and ‘mad’. Here they became an out-of-control “irrational, uncivilized animalistic being” that lost all awareness and sense of agency [Eatough and Smith, 2006a, p.489]. This use of metaphor to describe a changing sense of self also reappears in Eatough et al’s later studies (2008, 2009).

The current study extends the literature by providing detailed insight into the way young men describe themselves when angry, including uniquely their use of metaphors to convey their sense of being transformed into a more powerful being and one that conveys they are no longer in full control of their actions.

The use of metaphor as a means of description is found in the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Exploring metaphorical language specifically in relation to anger, Lakoff (1987) points out the complex conceptual structure which forms the basis of metaphor. By investigating the inferences that anger-related metaphors provide, we get an idea not only of the degree of anger somebody is feeling but also other aspects of the experience, including how the person is holding anger within them. Lakoff (1987) discusses how descriptions such as ‘looking daggers’, ‘foaming at the mouth’, and ‘their blood is boiling’ can tell us where somebody is within the anger cycle: whether they are building up to an outburst of emotion, are in the throes of the anger experience and are in full flow, or are more passively harbouring angry feelings.

These different kinds of metaphor, with their respective inferences, enable a metonymic description: a naming of the anger in a way we can associate with. The metaphor chosen in essence ascribes *meaning* to the anger experience. The young men in this study, when describing the ‘boom’ and ‘gale force’ of their anger, refer to the pressure behind the emotion in terms of both sound and wind, enabling us to relate to the emotion through its loudness and movement: that is, in terms of common experiences to which we can relate.

In the same way, participants’ descriptions of ‘hell’ and ‘war’ conjure up catastrophic places of extreme pain, while references to ‘crazy’, ‘mental’ and ‘nutter’ offer a representation of a psychological internal shift. Such usages offer a common metaphorical or figurative way of indicating the extent to which perception and stability are changed within the anger experience, as does the image of the ‘Hulk’, with its message of the power of anger. For the young men in this study anger is associated with great pressure, loud sound and a compelling need to transform into something bigger and more potent.

These findings add to the literature by richly describing anger for these young men as being loud, pressured and involving physical and psychological shifts. It illuminates the degree of transformation of self the participants experience when in the throes of anger, the use made of metaphorical language to capture this, and the need to adopt an all-powerful, omnipotent position in order to regain a sense of control over the situation they find themselves in.

#### **6.1.4 Loss of control and responsibility**

##### **6.1.4.1 Loss of control**

As the young men experience their changing sense of self there is an internal distancing from their actions for varying periods of time. Being angry takes on a life of its own; the

participants appear to lose control and lose awareness, and turn away from responsibility for their actions. Their sense of self gets lost and they act ‘as if’ they are what they have become, with no control over this crazy ‘hulk’-like ‘nutter’, the most ‘horrible person on the planet’. It is as if there is nothing they can do about it. They feel ‘doomed’, unable to take action to avert the outcome.

This loss of control, entwined with a loss of awareness, is described by Adrian [Line 136], which occurs in what he calls the middle of the anger experience. He remembers the beginning and the end but the middle is lost. He has no recollection of it. For him, this inability to remember what has happened means that he isn’t responsible for this period of time and what has happened in it.

The same happens for another participant [Dean, Line 67]. He describes his hands tensing up, after which he appears to lose awareness. He then feels surprised when in due course he sees what ‘these hands’ have done: for example, that they have smashed something up. In the case of two participants, what has been ‘smashed up’ could be another individual; once again, they describe their surprise and bewilderment at what they have done, along with a sense of sadness and inability to understand these feelings. They now question what has been happening within them.

Thomas et al (1998) found similar experiences reported by their female participants, who described episodes of losing control in anger where their ‘self’ became unrecognisable and where they were not fully aware of what they were saying or doing. Although the women’s initial sensory experience of anger was more controlled than that reported by the participants in the current study, as the women felt their sense of self changing their degree of control

drastically diminished. They used phrases such as “What is coming out of my mouth?” and “kind of like I’ve gone into somebody else” (Thomas et al, 1998, p.318) to describe these out-of-character episodes, in which they would scream, shout and hit out. Afterwards they found such behaviour hard to believe.

A similar loss of control is reported by Thomas (2003). Her male participants described themselves as being ‘eaten up’, ‘absorbed’ and ‘totally immobilized’; maintaining control was deemed difficult or impossible. The findings of the current study also concur with those of Eatough and Smith (2006a, 2006b), whose female participant describes being unable to prevent a ‘split second’ state where she loses control, a ‘blind rage’ period where she has no recall of what has happened until she sees the damage she has wrought during her anger outburst.

Similarly, Eatough et al’s (2008) female participants describe a loss of bodily control when in the grip of anger: they see dots in front of their eyes, or see red during what Eatough et al categorise as a “loss of clarity and/or cognitive and behavioral management” (Eatough et al, 2008, p.1776). However, when compared with the participants in the current study the women manifested a greater sense of responsibility within the experience, with most of them reporting a sense of guilt for their actions.

The results of the current study suggest a discernible shift in participants’ sense of control as the anger affects their sense of self, and involves a partial loss of awareness to which they respond with surprise upon ‘discovering’ what has occurred in the experience. As described in the earlier literature review, this has echoes of Jung’s (1991) ideas around the ‘shadow’

side of the personality, expressed with familiar terms such as “I don’t know what came over me,” or “That’s my dark side.”

The issue of awareness raises a number of complex questions. In the moment of anger, do the young men move out of awareness and lose control of their actions? Within the experience of anger, does a shift of consciousness occur, leading to these actions happening out of their awareness? Stern (2004, p.122) argues that

the present moment is the phenomenal content of a bounded stretch of awareness or consciousness. It exists only during a moment of awareness. Or must it be a moment of consciousness? And what is the difference?

Offering a number of responses to such questions, Stern (2004, p.123) clarifies that consciousness refers to “the process of being aware that you are aware,” rather than the focusing on an object of experience. If we look at the experience relative to the findings of the current study, Stern’s clarification suggests the young men’s experience to be occurring in what he calls “phenomenal consciousness”, where one is aware only of experiences as they are happening. Drawing on the work of Dretske (1998), Stern (2004) argues that it is possible to have a phenomenal conscious experience of which one is not aware. For example, when someone cannot recall seeing anything on the road that they have just been driving on for the last thirty minutes, even though they navigated the road safely, so must have seen the traffic. Added to that, what happens at this level of consciousness does not enter into long-term memory. This may explain why the participants in the current study cannot recollect parts of their anger experience, yet know that this experience of anger and loss of awareness has happened.

#### 6.1.4.2 Responsibility

As the young men discuss the impact of what has happened in their anger experience there is an element of surprise that distances them from responsibility for their actions. This is reflected in comments such as ‘Really?’, ‘Oh, sorry!’, ‘Oh no!’, and ‘It’s not my fault’. One participant (Adrian) laughs as he declares, “That’s my saying, ‘It’s not my fault’, and then I can blame it on someone else” [Adrian, Lines 161-162]. He smiles as he offers an explanation: “All I can do is say ‘oh, sorry’” [Adrian, Lines 153-154]. Dean describes seemingly not knowing what he was doing when smashing a door in; “I don’t know why I did that” [Dean, Line 71].

This element of participants’ narratives poses the question of the extent to which they are in what Sartre (1969) terms “bad faith”: the disowning of innate freedom in favour of acting inauthentically. It can be argued that in a mode of self-deception the young men attempt to evade responsibility for themselves as the agent of their anger behaviour, or at least part of it. In attributing their actions to an ‘out of awareness’ state they make themselves into an ‘Other’, thus no longer in control of themselves. In so doing, they assist the evasion of responsibility, along with a basic tenet of existential thinking: that a human being is always free to make choices. The paradox here refers us back to the earlier discussions around Van Deurzen’s (1997, p.246) ideas that anger demonstrates a position of one’s weakness and loss, where “We often end up losing what we fought for.” – in this sense the freedom we were fighting to retain.

In view of what I have argued earlier in relation to phenomenal consciousness, participants may be taking greater responsibility for the *impact and consequences* of their anger actions more than for their apparent loss of awareness and lack of control shown. However, choosing

to be responsible for certain aspects of one's behaviour while evading responsibility for others appears out of step with an authentic existence and is living in bad faith. Sartre (1969) argued that, as 'free beings', people are responsible for *all* elements of themselves, their consciousness and their actions. To declare oneself not responsible is to make a conscious choice, one that carries responsibility for what happens as a consequence of such inaction. A truly authentic existence is based on the notion that there is *always* choice. We are responsible even when we choose not to be.

This study develops the literature by showing that in the anger experience there is a shift in participants' mode of consciousness, one that affects their awareness. As a result, as participants reflect on their anger experience they turn away from (or are unaware of) certain aspects of it (what they did) and focus on others aspects (the provocation, the impact, for example) thus they struggle to assume responsibility for their actions. They know they are the one that has been angry (as the car driver knows they have been driving), yet they are not responsible for their actions because they are not aware of them happening. It suggests they are living in bad faith, having only partial recollection and partial aspects/elements of their experience and by this process they evade responsibility for their actions.

#### **6.1.5 Getting it out and getting away (subthemes 5 and 6)**

At the point where the energy within the anger experience propels participants into varying degrees of action, they seek to expel the anger. As noted in the literature review (above), the outward expression of anger features in the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2 (Spielberger, 1999b) and is recognised as a common mode of anger control. The young men in the current study go about directing the energy the anger generates onto themselves, another person (not always the Other who has provoked their anger), or inanimate objects

such as cars, furniture, walls, doors, or electrical appliances. The choice of target seems determined partly by the likely consequences, as considered in the small window the men have before their changing self takes over and they ‘lose awareness’. However, the objective remains the same: to get the anger out of them.

Once the anger has been directed onto something or somebody else, participants get the urge to leave the scene in order to enable their sense of self to re-emerge. This is akin to the Hulk’s escape to private safety for a period of time where no further anger can be ignited and he can return to himself. The time and space participants put between themselves and the anger experience allows them to regain a degree of composure and equanimity in which their sense of self can return.

These findings differ from those of Thomas et al (1998), whose female participants reported anger episodes that were less violent and more bound up with a personal sense of frustration. The women tended to keep their anger within them so as to preserve what Thomas et al (1998, p.319] call “relationship harmony”, a tendency which may be related to gender and social influences affecting women (Asher and Hilton, 1996). Whilst the men in the current study report some awareness of the possible consequences of their anger actions, they appear less concerned with the impact on their relationships than with the possible consequences for themselves.

In contrast, the findings of Thomas (2003, p.167) reveal male participants directing their anger outside themselves in order to unload the “burden” of it. This was particularly the case in respect of participants below the age of 33 years. Such action could involve hitting or kicking objects, or people. Older participants, although able to make a clearer, more



controlled judgment about how to let their anger out, described having experienced a similar need to expel their anger when reviewing anger experiences that had occurred earlier in their lives.

In respect of participants feeling a need to withdraw from the scene of their anger, Thomas (2003, p.172) notes the men's tendency to "isolate themselves after an anger incident", which correlates with the current study's findings.

Eatough and Smith (2006a, 2006b) describe their female participant letting out her anger on 'seemingly indiscriminate' objects. However, she does not leave the anger situation, due to the fact that she is unable to leave her child. Her reaction to her anger also appears to differ from that of the young men in the current study. She seems to undergo more of an internal struggle to bring the anger episode to an end, rather than seek to remove herself physically from the scene.

Eatough et al (2008), together with Eatough's further analysis (2009) of the same study, both reveal participants directing anger outwards. However their actions appear related more to regaining some sense of personal power than to expelling the anger they are feeling. The anger is also directed away in mainly verbal ways. Only in one case does a participant leave the scene of anger, and that appears more about curtailing the anger's escalation than regaining a sense of agency.

The findings of the current study add to the literature by providing insights into how the young male participants have to dispel their anger. They show the importance for the young men of finding a means to direct their anger out of themselves onto an external object or person. They also highlight the importance of being able to leave and distance themselves

from the scene of the anger. It shows that to re-establish themselves, both time and space within the experience is crucial.

By being directed onto another person or inanimate object, participants' anger is no longer contained within them; it becomes part of their wider lived-space. This view is supported by Jakupcak et al (2005, p.276), who argue that aggressive behaviour of this kind may be a strategy for regulating emotions, since "men may also use aggression to change the emotional context of a situation." Similarly, Sartre (1948) described anger expression as both a voluntary and a controlling process, aimed at reducing situational tension and thereby altering the context: the "breaking of one form and reconstitution of another" (Sartre, 1948, p.40). In the expression of anger, as the form transforms so then does the young men's consciousness of the difficulties that anger may present.

As the young men direct their anger outwards, they move away from the anger situation by putting space and time between them and their conscious awareness of the anger experience. As discussed in the literature review (above), Van Manen (1990) refers to four 'existentials' inherent in the human lifeworld, of which two – lived space (spatiality) and lived time (temporality) – are especially relevant to the findings of the current study. Spatiality, understood as the way a person experiences a place in which they find themselves, becomes an important aspect of participants' experience. They sense that changing the space in which they find themselves will affect the way they feel. Although unsure what that change will bring, they feel the need to 'be' somewhere else, in a different context, putting distance between that which has provoked the anger and that which was done in anger.

From a Heideggerian perspective, this concurs with Dasein (presence) inasmuch as “Dasein’s spatiality determines distance in terms of its own context of significance” (Dreyfus and Wrathall, 2006, p.433). Moving to a different space is therefore less about changing one’s physical locality than about achieving a different spatial context in which to regain a state of equanimity.

Within the Heideggerian concept of Dasein, temporality, or the notion of lived-time, is highlighted by the young men’s attribution of needing time within the process of their returning sense of self. Whether amounting to a minute, an hour, or simply a ‘while’, time is described as a ‘distancing’ process. In Ben’s words, “it’s a distance thing ... If you can put time between you and the issue you want to sort out ...” [Ben, Lines 242-246]. By projecting themselves towards the future, participants come to face the past. They are able to have sight of what Heidegger (1927/1962, p.326) describes as “having-been-ness” (*Gewesenheit*) or “living past.” This enables them to begin positioning their anger in their lived-time, and return in the present to an equanimous state. Positioning the experience, in essence, impacts their temporal surroundings (for Heidegger, their ‘horizon’ or boundary of perception).

These findings extend the literature by revealing that in the anger experience the participants look for a way to direct anger out of themselves in order to change the emotional context of the experience and reduce the possibility of further difficulties arising within them. Following this, there is a need to locate themselves in a different space so as to alter the spatial context of the anger event, which enables them to alter their experience of lived time so that they can return to a state of composure.

## 6.2 Summary

Thus far, this discussion has sought to situate the findings of the current study in the context of the existing literature. In terms of the three main themes and six subthemes identified during data analysis, attention has focussed on the dynamic impact of anger, both on participants' awareness of self in relation to other people and on their physical sensory experience. The anger emotion is shown to have brought about a transformation in participants' self-awareness, self-construct and degree of conscious awareness and control. The discussion has also explored how participants went about regaining control of their anger and the strategies they used to regain equanimity.

The findings highlight how young men paradoxically experience a state of disengagement from others in the anger experience yet at the same time retain a heightened sense of care for the Other from within their intersubjective state. This indicates a tussle between needing to be right at all costs and at the same time desiring congruence and authenticity.

The findings also suggest that during anger episodes the body undergoes intense, dynamic processes. While the feelings generated by the anger emotion enable the movement of the emotion through and out of the body, participants also experience a degree of detachment from their sense of embodied self.

The young men's metaphorical representations of themselves as angry point to the powerful sounds, pressure and the degree of transformation they experience when in the throes of anger. There is a need to adopt an omnipotent, 'larger than life' position in order to regain a sense of control over the situation they find themselves in.

The findings suggest that participants' sense of control undergoes a shift as the anger alters their sense of self. This leads to a partial loss of awareness, and they respond with surprise upon 'discovering' what has occurred during the episode. The question has been raised as to how much the young men's loss of awareness may be related to a specific mode of consciousness within the anger episode, one that affects the quality, clarity and accuracy of their reflective awareness/ability, leaving them struggling to assume reasonability for actions they cannot fully recollect. Questions have also been raised regarding the role of authenticity in the actions of the young men and the notion of responsibility in the choices they make.

Finally, the findings shed light on the processes through which participants pass in order to dispel their anger. For the young men, it is important to find a means of directing feelings of anger out of themselves and onto an external object or person. There is then a need for them to change their location so as to alter the context of the anger, and allow time for reflective adjustment and thus foster a return to a state of calm and composure.

## **6.3 Methodological considerations and critical reflections**

### **6.3.1 Strengths and limitations**

To date, much of the research on anger has been conducted with female participants in the United Kingdom (Eatough & Smith, 2006a; Eatough & Smith, 2006b; Eatough et al, 2008; Eatough, 2009). The main exceptions are the studies by Thomas et al (1998) whose focus is on the experience of anger in women living in the USA, and by Thomas (2003), whose focus is on the socially constructed ideas and meanings of anger for middle-aged men, also living in the USA.

The current study adds to this body of research by exploring anger as experienced by a small sample of young men living in the United Kingdom. Through its focus on the lived experience of anger, it offers a rich, nuanced account of what anger is like within a young man's lifeworld. The study has sought to unearth dynamic, phenomenological layers of the anger emotion as it is felt. By so doing, it offers insight into the moments where young men experience a powerful, paradoxical shift in their interrelatedness, physiology, embodied sense of self and self-concept, and how these are expressed in relation to their spatial and temporal existence.

By illuminating the complexities of the anger phenomenon, this study has underlined the need to understand the experience of anger in young men and how this impacts on their being-in-the-world. Continuing dialogue on the existential phenomenological experience of anger is called for in order to further inform approaches to anger in young men and deepen understanding of the anger process, both within society at large and within the psychological, educational and therapeutic community.

The findings have offered rich textured descriptions of the anger experience through a deep engagement with the 'what it is like' of each participant. Their narratives were dynamic, evocative and at times exhausting, and this is mirrored in my engagement with the participants during the interviews and reflected upon in the subsequent analysis.

During the research, I endeavoured to engage in a multi-layered analysis of the anger phenomenon as it was presented, both in descriptive terms and at a more interpretive level. Engaging the hermeneutic circle offered me solid guidance as I sought to unravel the

complexity of participants' anger experiences, explored emerging themes and moved between the parts and the whole of what was emerging, as proposed by Gadamer (1997).

In this process I remained mindful throughout of the need for a reflexive relationship with the text. Whilst this was not specifically prescribed as part of the IPA method, I felt it provided closer engagement with the phenomenon under investigation and greater transparency in relaying this process. I have looked to demonstrate this transparent attitude through the reflexive process sections at the end of Chapters 2 to 6.

I consider my use of IPA as the chosen methodology for this study a suitable choice. IPA is not simply a matter of following a method (Smith, 2010); it is an approach that recognises the role of the researcher as a foundational aspect of good research. However, it is also important to recognise the limitations of IPA, in particular the critique that its methodology is scientifically weak because it does not follow generally accepted scientific criteria such as replicability (the idea that the same results will be found by a different researcher investigating the same data (Giorgi, 2010)).

However, Smith (2010) argues that IPA is not a prescriptive methodology and that the methodologies inherent in quantitative and qualitative methodologies are different and should not be equated. This view is supported by Brocki and Wearden (2006), who argue that if studies are methodologically rigorous, transparent and clear regarding their philosophical underpinnings, they are of value.

Identifying another limitation of IPA, Willig (2001) argues that phenomenological research is interested in getting to the 'what it is like' of the experience, and that in IPA the role of

language plays too central a role, with the value of participants' accounts relying too heavily on "representational validity" (Willig, 2001, p.63). She questions the expressive ability of participants to communicate the rich texture of experience that phenomenological research seeks.

It could be argued, however, that rather than uncovering 'pure experience', which Smith et al (2009) see as wholly inaccessible, IPA looks to engage with the subtleties and nuances of what is both said and left unsaid. It seeks to get as close as possible to the experience by uncovering the pre-reflective meaning and sense-making of the individual's experience through their language (Eatough and Smith, 2006).

This research was based on a small, purposive sample of participants who were interviewed in order to obtain a depth of understanding of the experience of anger, with a view to adding to existing knowledge and informing future research. The use of small sample sizes in IPA is an area of concern highlighted by Pringle et al (2011), who question the degree of generalisability possible on the basis of such small samples. However, Smith et al (2009) contend that the limited number of participants indicative of an IPA study opens the way to richer, deeper analysis than that which might be achieved with a larger sample size. Wagstaff et al (2014) highlight the potential problems associated with larger sample sizes, in particular the danger of losing individual lived-experience.

As recommended by Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009), a homogenous, purposive sample was used in the current study to ensure as far as possible that participants shared traits relevant to the research question. In this case participants had to be male, between 20 and 25 years of age and willing to discuss an experience of being angry. Initially I intended to identify



participants through anger management groups, a strategy that proved successful for the first participant. The remaining participants were recruited through the ‘snowball’ effect. All the participants resided in one part of the U.K and were in full-time employment: factors which enhanced the homogeneity of the sample. At the same time, I was aware of a tension between ensuring a consistent sample and ending up with one wider than anticipated, and this made me mindful of the likely impact on the study’s transferability and relationship with existing theory (Pringle et al, 2011). I was aware that a greater range could have been achieved had some of my participants lived in different parts of the country or had come from more varied socio-economic backgrounds.

For the gathering of data I chose to use semi-structured interviews, an effective data collection method (Smith and Osborn, 2003) consistent with IPA’s aim to achieve a deep and thorough account of participants’ experiences and especially useful for novice researchers (Smith et al, 2009). This method of data collection offers the researcher structure (invaluable for a novice wanting to follow basic aspects of a methodology) while at the same time giving participants sufficient freedom and space to guide the interview.

In preparation for the interview process, I undertook a pilot study which helped me identify limitations in the interview design and gave me experience in conducting an interview. This process refined my interview questions and skills, specifically in relation to unearthing the participants’ implicit meanings. During interviews I sought to ask open-ended questions, using secondary prompt questions when necessary to encourage participants’ deeper involvement in the process and aid the process of delving into the ‘what it is like’ essence of their experiences. However, I would ask such secondary questions only after giving participants adequate time to find their own way with the questions, so as not to influence the

direction of their narratives. At the same time, I recognise that such intervention will have influenced their accounts in certain ways. In addition, the very existence of the interview schedule with its questions had an impact on my staying with what was being revealed; I was mindful of the need to unearth as many facets of the anger experience as possible within the time constraint of 60 minutes. It is possible that a more open-ended interview schedule, one that allowed more scope for participants to venture into what was relevant for them, would have added greater depth to the findings. However, I was acutely aware of the need to keep a tight focus, mindful that in asking participants to enter in dialogue about an emotion as sensitive and potentially explosive as anger I was also responsible for keeping them safe and away from any unnecessary distress.

In asking participants to disclose powerful, emotionally driven experiences I was aware of the possibility that some participants might have altered their narratives in order to be seen or judged in a more favourable light, especially considering I was relatively unknown to them and that we had had very little time to build any kind of reciprocal understanding prior to interviews. In my interview schedule I attempted to address this possibility by asking participants at the end what it had been like speaking to ‘me’ about anger (to which I had varying responses). With hindsight I could have asked them this question at the beginning of the schedule to accommodate the possibility of narratives being affected by participants’ need for social acceptance and approval. However, this might have positioned the interview as something viewed from my own point of reference (as the researcher), rather than as an attempt to explore participant’s personal lived experience of anger.

My choice of IPA as a methodological approach was influenced by my belief that IPA was aligned to the phenomenon under investigation and offered a structure that acknowledged the

personal and professional influence of the researcher's experiences on the research process (Smith et al, 2009). Bearing this in mind, I acknowledge that another researcher could have identified different qualities within the anger phenomenon and formulated alternative findings.

The analysis of the data in this research was conducted following Smith et al's (2009) strategies, as outlined in the methodology chapter (above). I remained as close to the IPA guidelines as possible whilst acknowledging the creativeness that IPA encourages. The process provided a step-by-step guide to analysing the data. It also reminded me of the need to engage the epoché by stepping in and out of an interpretive, reflexive stance (Finlay, 2011), and remaining attentive to the idiographic nature of participants' narratives. This fostered an intimate connection with participants' narratives that might not have been possible had a more quantitative methodology been used (Clarke, 2009).

This attentive stance has been informed and developed through my psychotherapeutic practice, where I seek to adopt a phenomenological attitude and apply an existential lens. I believe this stance to constitute a strength of the current study. However, it is possible that I may have been immersed too deeply in the interview process, to the detriment of other dimensions (for example, the hermeneutic essence). However, in my attempt to achieve a degree of balance within the research process I sought during each stage to bracket and reflect as much as possible, recording my own process by keeping a journal and using my own personal psychotherapy, along with my academic supervision, as spaces for reflection.

## **6.4 Validity and quality**

The current study has sought to comply with all four of Yardley's (2000) guidelines for assessing validity and quality in qualitative research, as outlined below.

### **6.4.1 Sensitivity to context**

In order to show sensitivity to participants' accounts, my analysis and interpretation employed an idiographic focus on each individual participant's context. Interviews were conducted in such a way as to encourage narratives to flow naturally. Mindful of my position as researcher (and the power inherent in that), I employed empathy and rapport to foster dialogue and equalise as far as possible the power relationship between participants and myself. In order to assess my own influence on the ongoing research processes I adopted a reflexive stance throughout. I also considered the social context of the research through my extensive literature review and by contextualising my findings in relation to existing theory and knowledge.

### **6.4.2 Commitment and rigour**

Attending to rigour required my full immersion in the research process. This included thorough preparation with regards to the sampling, the interview schedule and the subsequent analysis. The sample was selected on the basis of a careful search geared to the identification of a homogenous set of participants. The interview schedule sought to attend as fully as possible to the research question and the lived-experience of the participants. Rigour was maintained during the multi-layered process of data analysis.

The subsequent findings show a commitment to participants' accounts through their focus on idiographic elements as well as the commonalities between cases. By this means, they reveal

the richness of the experience of anger, along with its similarities and differences. The main themes to emerge from the data analysis are supported by quotations from participant accounts and are related to the extant literature.

#### **6.4.3 Transparency and coherence**

While writing up this research, I have sought to describe in detail every stage of the process, using clear and concise language. I anticipated in advance the notion of the imagined reader, and hence the third hermeneutic level (Smith et al, 2009). The process by which I arrived at my themes is documented in appendices 7 and 8. The process was overseen by my supervisors' ongoing monitoring, in particular in relation to the transcripts and the extraction of themes. This is consistent with Smith et al's (2009) recommendation of independent auditing to further show the validity of analysis. In addition, I have provided an ongoing reflexive account of my own processes while conducting the study.

#### **6.4.4 Impact and importance**

While I consider the findings of the present study to shed important light on the intricate process of anger, the impact and importance of this research study will be proven with the test of time. However, I will next consider the potential impact and importance of the current study.

### **6.5 Significance of the study and its implications for practice**

In the past, research into anger has often been simply an adjunct to problems considered of greater concern, such as anxiety and depression. Indeed, anger has been described as the "forgotten emotion" (DiGiuseppe et al, 1994, p.3). It has been defined in so many different ways that understanding of its essence has remained elusive (DiGiuseppe and Tafrate, 2007; Wranick and Scherer, 2010). Trying to define anger is complex, given that the emotion

comprises a myriad of contextually driven and changing thoughts, beliefs, images, verbal and bodily responses, as well as personal and societal factors, and the meanings derived from them (Kassinove, 1995; Ellsworth and Scherer, 2003; Hall, 2009).

Research into anger has tended to be quantitative in nature and conducted primarily at a biological level, leaving the lived, everyday experience of anger somewhat unexplored (Averill, 1982).

While anger has been researched from a qualitative perspective, such research is scarce. There is little to help individuals understand their anger emotion deeper or to learn how to exist alongside such a powerful emotion. A greater emphasis is needed on exploring the ‘what it is like’ aspect of anger. There also needs to be a greater focus on men’s early psycho-education and the development of their cognitive abilities in relation to understanding such areas as their own anger management, assertiveness and conflict management. This might help reduce inner conflicts in men derived from historical-cultural ideas about what it means to be a man.

Existing research into the lived-experience of anger has for the most part involved female participants in the UK (Eatough and Smith, 2006a, 2006b; Eatough et al, 2008; Eatough, 2009). To date, only one qualitative study into men’s experience of anger has been published, on the basis of a sample of 19 participants living in the USA, only two of whom were aged between 20-25 years (Thomas, 2003).

The present study is significant in terms of the insights it offers into the experience of anger in young men in the United Kingdom. It offers a detailed description of what happens to the

men at a number of lived-world layers: within their inter-relational world during anger; how they experience anger from a body-self perspective; how their self-concept undergoes change; and how they deal with issues of awareness, consciousness, control, responsibility and choice. The study illuminates how the anger process unfolds, from the young men's first awareness of the emotion, to how they react and respond physically, psychologically and behaviourally, until ultimately they bring themselves back to a state of equanimity.

This research has a number of possible implications for practice and for training establishments. Currently, anger management techniques employed in therapeutic settings or anger management groups focus on arresting the eruption of anger (Fisher, 2005), finding creative ways of 'letting go' of anger (Potter-Efron and Potter-Efron, 2006), or helping clients acquire coping mechanisms, including physical and cognitive exercises, to manage their anger (O'Neill, 1999). For example, Hall (2009) explores working with different aspects of personality and defining anger as separate from rage. Itten (2011) proposes the use of several psychotherapeutic approaches, including the notion of role adoption (that is, victim versus perpetrator) as a way to help people understand the part played by anger in their inter- (and intra-) personal relationships. More recently, mindfulness meditation (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2001; Fisher, 2012) has been integrated into anger management programmes and therapeutic approaches working with clients presenting with anger issues.

At root, such approaches share the same message: the need to regain control over one's emotional reactions and responses. In contrast, the current study suggests the need for a more thorough exploration of the lifeworld of young men who experience anger as a natural, essential and purposeful emotion. It proposes a greater appreciation of the existential and

phenomenological dimensions of the anger experience: how a particular individual experiences anger and what the emotion elicits from their unique lived world.

The results of the current study suggest that young men might find it of educational benefit and therapeutic value to learn how to engage a narrative on their interpersonal awareness within relationships. Here, they would be encouraged to consider the layers involved in relating to others, thereby raising their awareness of the intricacies of communication, whether explicit or implicit. This could serve to clarify the multi-layered meanings conveyed within even the most straightforward of interactions. Young men could gain greater understanding of how their sense of self can be impacted by another in the process of communication, thereby improving their grasp of the workings of intersubjectivity. Here, the model of the ‘Johari window’ (Luft and Ingham, 1955), although dated, remains a useful heuristic method of discovering how one communicates with another. This kind of education might help young men retain a sense of power (Jukes, 2010) within their sense of self and a more solid sense of agency within their inter-relational world.

Young men with anger issues might also be encouraged to develop a clearer perspective on their predetermined beliefs and expectations, especially in terms of others’ behaviour towards them. As such beliefs may stem from past notions about others’ intentions, the invitation to re-examine past choices and consider alternative possibilities can encourage an individual to open themselves to their potential (May, 1983). Spinelli (2001) argues that rather than conceptualising the ‘self’ as fixed (in the case of young men in the anger experience, the self as cornered or attacked), people need room for the ‘construction of self and others’. Here, the individual enters into a state of becoming *through* co-constituted interdependent relationships, an idea which embraces the notion of choice and, in Heideggerian terms,



authenticity. This could have an empowering impact on young men, particularly in relation to how they hold their agentic self and respond to perceived attacks on their sense of self.

This study highlights the need to understand the nature of the dynamic physiological changes that can occur as anger begins to be felt. These are linked to the ways in which the expressive element of the emotion begins to impact young men's perceptions of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002). A focus on the notions of fore and ground, whereby experiences are either present in our awareness or are pushed to the back of our awareness, could help young men understand that while anger may not be in their current awareness, it may well be stirring up within them – out of their awareness and beyond what they can yet perceive. By applying a heightened level of understanding, they can better grasp the meaning of the sensations they experience in anger. If encouraged to explore their meaning-making of these physiological sensations in therapy sessions, group work and other educational arenas, young men may gain greater awareness of the importance of communicating their lived-body experience of anger through their language (Damasio, 2000).

Within therapeutic practice, a focus on the 'language of anger' could include young men's self-concepts when angry, as seen in the dynamic metaphors they use to describe their 'transformation'. The 'Hulk' example found in this study conveys the message of an individual pushed to their limits, unable to take any more and exploding, with no way of controlling the ensuing rage. Getting acquainted with the conceptual borrowing this kind of metaphor involves and the wider metaphorical nature of concept formation (Nietzsche, 2000) may enable us to get closer to the meaning anger holds for individuals, and perhaps revise our perception of what is being presented for that individual. The varying metonymic descriptions in this study portray very different meanings and associations for each young

man, suggesting that the metaphorical images the young men use may help them gain a deeper understanding of what elicits anger within them, and what *being* angry means in relation to that.

Another area that could be explored with young men experiencing anger is their ability to be more present in their everyday awareness of things outside their anger experience. As Stern (2004, p.123) notes, “*Consciousness* refers to the process of being aware that you are aware.” That young men might gain from concentrated approaches such as mindfulness and meditation is a view supported by Thomas (2003) and Fisher (2012). Entering states of stillness and purposeful self-reflection may have the effect of slowing young men down, enabling them to create a more mindful connection with their lived-world and gain the benefits which come with maturity. Describing how older men experience anger, Thomas (2003, p.172) finds they can “have more realistic expectations, make finer distinctions, and display less volatile responses.” They also reveal evidence of heightened empathy towards others.

This study has highlighted the importance of helping young men gain an understanding of what Van Manen (1990) calls the ‘existentials’: aspects relating to *lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality). The areas I have discussed are in essence about helping young men develop a greater sense of clarity in their lived-world: to be more alert to the intricacies of interrelatedness, more aware of the body-self and its potential, and more conscious of the personal meanings of one’s anger. Consciousness of the lifeworld involves a constant examination of the process of living, one that enables the individual to face their existence authentically.

The proposition that Kierkegaard subscribed to and which was later made explicit by Sartre; that for human beings, ‘existence precedes essence’ remains a fundamental doctrine of existentialism. The notion that we choose how we live, and that we alone are responsible for our choices, is for many people too much to bear. This is the double-edged sword that is ‘personal freedom’. In this study we see this in what the young men have to say about their responsibility (or otherwise) for their actions during episodes of anger. The findings of the current study suggests that it is not enough simply to *assume* responsibility, since accepting such total responsibility entails a profound adjustment of one’s attitude towards life. In this sense, educational and therapeutic practice involving anger and anger management may benefit by helping young men develop a sense of agency sufficiently robust enough to enable them to accept that the choices they make are indeed theirs, and that they are responsible for all their actions (and lack of action). By becoming more involved with their personal lifeworld choices and what these may present, young men may be helped to develop a belief in their capacity to influence their own thoughts and behaviours, and thus become more resilient and flexible in the face of conflict or change.

## **6.6 Future research**

The findings of the current study have demonstrated the relationship between six young men’s experience of anger and their sense of agentic self. Whilst the small sample has provided rich insights into the experience of anger, further research involving young men from more diverse backgrounds would be a useful addition to our understanding of how anger impacts young men’s capacity to make life choices.

A significant theme in this study was the link between participants’ difficulties and how they dealt with relationships and inter-subjectivity. Further research in this area could help young

men better understand the nuances and intricacies inherent in interpersonal relationships, improving the clarity of their communication with others. This also touches on another central finding of the current study: the way in which young men's self-concept undergoes transformation during episodes of anger. Further research into the descriptive terms and metaphorical language young men may use when describing themselves as angry could shed additional light on the meanings that anger conveys.

In the current study the notion of authenticity was pervasive, as was that of 'bad faith'. Both areas would seem to warrant further investigation, especially in relation to the responsibility young men assume over their actions when angry and the extent to which their actions when angry may be out of their awareness. The role played by self-deception also demands further attention.

In this study, young men revealed a propensity to expel their anger outwards, and then get away from the scene of anger in order to change the context. Further phenomenological research into how young men express anger might suggest other possible means of anger expression and how these can help in the management of anger.

## **6.7 Reflexive exploration**

This chapter has been both a struggle and a revelation. In previous chapters I found that having some structure to follow enabled me to bury myself in a systematic approach to the process. But in this chapter I felt for the first time that I really had to stand up and *say* something! It was no longer just a case of proposing relevant literature, summarising methodology, or reporting the results of my data analysis. Now, I – Tom – had to gather my

own thoughts and state what I saw as the important aspects of the experience of anger for young men. Initially this was anxiety-provoking. Was I capable of doing this?

It was at this point that I really grasped the potency of engaging in the reflexive process. I allowed myself to step away from the task of offering points for discussion, instead immersing myself in what the analysis had unearthed and how that related to the literature. I also came to a deeper appreciation of the methodology I had used to investigate the phenomenon, and how important it had been to declare my epistemological position. While it had felt as though each chapter had required me to step into a different way of thinking and processing, writing the discussion gave me the sense that it had all come together, enabling me to say with clarity what had emerged from the study.

As I began reaching a position about what had emerged from the analysis, I found I needed to explore my conclusions in relation to existing research. This involved my re-reading each piece of research I had included in my literature review, which to a large degree felt as though I were reading the research afresh. I felt doubt creep in, and found myself questioning everything I had previously written. This left me in a place of ambiguity and uncertainty. At the same time, however, I sensed that I was understanding the existing research at a new and deeper level. Not only was I becoming aware of key aspects of existing research, I was also getting better acquainted with the participants in the various studies as I delved into their lived-experience, trying to understand it from as close a place as possible. This process changed the way I approached the whole study. For the first time it felt as though my research was in the process of becoming a cohesive whole, rather than a collection of segmented, fractured parts.

I then confronted a further challenge: that of linking what was emerging in the themes with the theoretical base of the research. This felt as if yet another layer of me was deciding how and which existential phenomenological philosophies were relevant to what I was presenting. Once again, I searched the existing literature to ensure, as far as possible, that the elements of participants' experience I was interpreting from an existential phenomenological perspective, actually aligned with the essence of that perspective. This required me to dig deep into my psychotherapeutic training, after which my re-reading began again! Now finding myself in a perpetual cycle of reflexivity, I *felt* the essence of the hermeneutic circle more powerfully than ever before.

While this process has been one of the toughest challenges of my academic career, it has also been of great personal benefit. I recall commenting to Emmy van Deurzen once that training in existential psychotherapy felt like entering a 'grown up' world, armed with a perspective that enabled me to develop greater sophistication in the ways I worked and communicated with clients (and people in general). Formulating and writing this chapter has proved a similar kind of experience. It has lifted me to a finer appreciation of the essence of phenomenology. It has reminded me that while we can never really know what another is experiencing (since parts of their experience remain outside their own awareness), searching closely and carefully *alongside* them can give us wonderfully rich insights, ones which take us closer to the meanings people ascribe to their lived world.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

The accounts of the participants in this research have provided important insights into the dynamic, volatile lived world of young men when in the grip of anger. Participants experienced an unfolding process of anger in their interactions with others. They became aware of a struggle within their intersubjective relationship with another (who was deemed to be attacking them in some way). They experienced deep visceral sensations stirring and rising from within them and a transformation of their sense of self and self-concept. A shift in their state of consciousness and awareness resulted in them needing to get the anger out in a variety of ways, often involving damage to objects or other people. This enabled them to expel the force of the emotion, after which they sought to regain a state of equanimity by leaving the scene of their anger and taking time to regain their composure. This marked the end of the process.

Returning to my initial research question, I feel I have gained greater insight both into what causes anger in young men and into how they experience anger in psychological, emotional and physiological terms. Through descriptions and stories derived from their lived world experiences, the young men illuminate the complexities of the anger experience, whose potency and dynamism is well captured by Fessler's (2010, p.368) phrase: the "male flash of anger".

When I started this research I asked the question, 'What happens in the experience of anger within young men'? Now, after completing the study, I realise that my questions around anger were in part prompted by my own search for answers. I needed to understand what it was that stirred young men into such a state of anger, with altercations of such ferocity. I emerge from this research with a better appreciation of the process young men enter into

when they become angry, and of how they can end up engaging within some of the behaviours that I myself once struggled with (as described in the introduction).

I have been surprised by the complexity of the anger process and the ambiguities that are present within the experience of anger. On the one hand, the men in my study became detached from themselves at both a psychological and an embodied level, whilst on the other hand, they were very much connected to their physical self. They fought to maintain a sense of agency in their communication and yet lost their sense of agency in their actions. A powerful sense of ‘care’ remained present for them, in terms of their sense of self and how the Other related to them, even during the expulsion of anger.

The ‘larger than life’ quality of men’s experience of anger, indicated by the metaphors participants used to convey the immense size and power of the emotion they felt and perceived, showed how all-consuming and dynamic anger can be. That the participant’s relinquished responsibility for their actions perhaps came as little surprise.

The experiences of the young men who shared their accounts of anger in the current study suggest a need for individuals with anger issues (in particular young men) to be guided to greater awareness of fundamental aspects of living: in Van Manen’s (1990) terms, the ‘existentials’ of lived space, lived body, lived time and lived human relations. This major finding of the current study has enabled me to stand back and consider anger as a factor of lived-world experiencing rather than an isolated emotion intermittently triggered in young men. By giving more credence to the vitality of these dimensions within the lifeworld of young men, it may be possible to help them better manage their experiences of anger.



Through its attempt to explore the complex emotion of anger as it is experienced, the present study hopes to stimulate a larger debate within the psychological and therapeutic communities and to prompt further research into what can no longer afford to be regarded as the ‘forgotten emotion.’

## **7.1 Final thoughts**

Undertaking this research has been one of the most challenging endeavours of my life, and also one of the most rewarding. I recall starting to formulate my ideas around how the study would work and what I would look to uncover and illuminate, and I feel at this closing stage that I could never have anticipated the struggles I would have faced along the way, and the growth I would experience in relation to both my academic and personal development.

It feels a great achievement to arrive at the end of this research journey, but it feels much more than that. I feel I have arrived at the beginning of a new journey that is about to unfold, in which I have experienced learning how to ‘think’ about thinking. This has offered me a new found clarity, and it is an exciting prospect to move forward with.

I feel I have grown in terms of my appreciation of the complexity of emotion, and also how human beings experience and endure the multi layered lived-world. This research project has enabled me this learning and I will be forever grateful for having had the opportunity to undertake such a task. On a personal level I have shifted my feelings about anger considerably. What I once considered on occasion a somewhat potentially ‘ugly’ emotion, has now been illuminated as an aspect of the human experience that is indicative to me of just how well human beings cope with the reality of existence.

Finally, it has opened my heart in relation to how young men especially manage the most powerful of emotions that is anger, along with everything else that they are trying to grapple with in their development, as well as what society additionally expects of them.

To the young men who took a step into their lived world of anger with me for the purposes of this study, I am truly grateful. I am left emotionally moved, and also wondering how many other young men they will unknowingly help with the courage they showed, on top of all else they are managing, to share their experiences and their lives in relation to anger.

I thank them for their honesty in sharing their truth.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 Ethical Clearance

### Psychology Department

#### REQUEST FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

**Applicant (specify):** DProf      **Date submitted:**.....

**No study may proceed until this form has been signed by an authorised person, indicating that ethical approval has been granted.** For collaborative research with another institution, ethical approval must be obtained from all institutions involved.

This form should be accompanied by any other relevant materials, (e.g. questionnaire to be employed, letters to participants/institutions, advertisements or recruiting materials, information sheet for participants<sup>1</sup>, consent form<sup>2</sup>, or other, including approval by collaborating institutions). A fuller description of the study may be requested.

• Is this the first submission of the proposed study? Yes/~~No~~

• Is this an amended proposal (resubmission)? Yes/~~No~~

**Psychology Office: if YES, please send this back to the original referee**

• Is this an urgent application? (To be answered by Staff/Supervisor only) Yes/No

Supervisor to initial here \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) of investigator(s)    Tom Barber

Name of supervisor(s)

Title of study: Explosions: A phenomenological exploration into the lived experience of 'uncontrollable' anger in men.

1. Please attach a brief description of the nature and purpose of the study, including details of the procedure to be employed. Identify the ethical issues involved, particularly in relation to the treatment/experiences of participants, session length, procedures, stimuli, responses, data collection, and the storage and reporting of data.

SEE ATTACHED PROJECT PROPOSAL

2. Could any of these procedures result in any adverse reactions? YES/NO  
 If "yes", what precautionary steps are to be taken?

Describing lived-world can bring up emotional experiences as one reflects on the phenomenon. Realisations of how things really are for the participants may cause some emotional reactions.

- The participant can withdraw at any time during the interview and it will be the researcher's responsibility to monitor the client's reactions throughout the interview.
- The researcher also can terminate the interview if they are deemed as too vulnerable or distressed.
- The interviews are going to deliberately take place in a therapy centre where there is easy access to a referral to a qualified therapist.
- Debriefing will take place directly after the interview and again approx 2 weeks from then to endeavour to ensure that participants do not feel vulnerable after the interview.

3. Will any form of deception be involved that raises ethical issues? ~~YES~~/NO  
*(Most studies in psychology involve mild deception insofar as participants are unaware of the experimental hypotheses being tested. Deception becomes unethical if participants are likely to feel angry or humiliated when the deception is revealed to them).*

Note: if this work uses existing records/archives and does not require participation per se, tick here ..... and go to question 10. (Ensure that your data handling complies with the Data Protection Act).

4. If participants other than Middlesex University students are to be involved, where do you intend to recruit them? *(A full risk assessment must be conducted for any work undertaken off university premises)<sup>6,7</sup>*

Local anger management and stress management classes

5. Does the study involve

Clinical populations	<del>YES</del> /NO
Children (under 16 years)	<del>YES</del> /NO
Vulnerable adults such as individuals with mental health problems, learning disabilities, prisoners, elderly, young offenders?	<del>YES</del> /NO

6. How, and from whom (e.g. from parents, from participants via signature) will informed consent be obtained? *(See consent guidelines<sup>2</sup>; note special considerations for some questionnaire research)*

From participants via signature

7. Will you inform participants of their right to withdraw from the research at any time, without penalty? *(see consent guidelines<sup>2</sup>)* YES/NO

8. Will you provide a full debriefing at the end of the data collection phase? YES/NO  
*(see debriefing guidelines<sup>3</sup>)*

9. Will you be available to discuss the study with participants, if necessary, to monitor any negative effects or misconceptions? YES/NO  
 If "no", how do you propose to deal with any potential problems?



10. Under the Data Protection Act, participant information is confidential unless otherwise agreed in advance. Will confidentiality be guaranteed? (see confidentiality guidelines<sup>5</sup>) **YES/NO**  
If "yes" how will this be assured (see<sup>5</sup>)

All data collected (taped) will be anonymous and will be destroyed once a transcript has been completed. All materials will be kept under lock and key in a secure filing cabinet. No information will be recorded that could identify the participant.

If "no", how will participants be warned? (see<sup>5</sup>)

(NB: You are not at liberty to publish material taken from your work with individuals without the prior agreement of those individuals).

11. Are there any ethical issues which concern you about this particular piece of research, not covered elsewhere on this form? **YES/NO**  
If "yes" please specify.

Yes	No
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. Some or all of this research is to be conducted away from Middlesex University

If "yes", tick here to confirm that a Risk Assessment form is to be submitted

13. I am aware that any modifications to the design or method of this proposal will require me to submit a new application for ethical approval

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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14. I am aware that I need to keep all materials/documents relating to this study (e.g. participant consent forms, filled questionnaires, etc) until completion of my degree

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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15. I have read the British Psychological Society's *Ethical Principles for Conducting Research with Human participants*<sup>4</sup> and believe this proposal to conform with them

(NB: If "yes" has been responded to any of questions 2,3,5,11 or "no" to any of questions 7-10, a full explanation of the reason should be provided -- if necessary, on a separate sheet submitted with this form).

Researcher... Thomas Barber      date 17.02.10

Signatures of approval: Supervisor..... date .....

Ethics Panel ..... date .....

(signed, pending completion of a Risk Assessment form if applicable)

<sup>1,2,3,4,5,6,7</sup> Guidelines are available from the Ethics page of Oas!sPlus

## Appendix 2 Risk Assessment

### INDEPENDENT FIELD/LOCATION WORK RISK ASSESSMENT FRA1

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*This proforma is applicable to, and must be completed in advance for, the following fieldwork situations:*

- 1. All fieldwork undertaken independently by individual students, either in the UK or overseas, including in connection with proposition module or dissertations. Supervisor to complete with student(s).*
- 2. All fieldwork undertaken by postgraduate students. Supervisors to complete with student(s).*
- 3. Fieldwork undertaken by research students. Student to complete with supervisor.*
- 4. Fieldwork/visits by research staff. Researcher to complete with Research Centre Head.*
- 5. Essential information for students travelling abroad can be found on [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)*

#### FIELDWORK DETAILS

**Name:** Tom Barber

**Student No:** M00262992

**Research Centre (staff only)**.....

**Supervisor:** Pnina Shinebourne

**Degree course** DProf in Existential Psychotherapy  
and Counselling

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Telephone numbers and name of next  
of kin who may be contacted in the  
event of an accident

#### NEXT OF KIN

**Name:** Sandra Barber

**Phone:** 01206 841650

**Physical or psychological limitations  
to carrying out the proposed  
fieldwork**

None

**Any health problems (full details)**  
Which may be relevant to proposed  
fieldwork activity in case of  
emergencies.

No

**Locality (Country and Region)**

Interviews will take place in The Turner Centre, Head Street,  
Colchester, Essex, England.

**Travel Arrangements**

Cycle

NB: Comprehensive travel and health insurance must always be obtained for independent overseas fieldwork.

**Dates of Travel and Fieldwork**

Field work proposed to take place between April and June 2010

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**PLEASE READ THE INFORMATION OVERLEAF VERY CAREFULLY**

**Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment**

**PLEASE READ VERY CAREFULLY**

List the localities to be visited or specify routes to be followed (**Col. 1**). For each locality, enter the potential hazards that may be identified beyond those accepted in everyday life. Add details giving cause for concern (**Col. 2**).

**Examples of Potential Hazards :**

Adverse weather: exposure (heat, sunburn, lightening, wind, hypothermia)

Terrain: rugged, unstable, fall, slip, trip, debris, and remoteness. Traffic: pollution.

Demolition/building sites, assault, getting lost, animals, disease.

Working on/near water: drowning, swept away, disease (weils disease, hepatitis, malaria, etc), parasites', flooding, tides and range.

Lone working: difficult to summon help, alone or in isolation, lone interviews.

Dealing with the public: personal attack, causing offence/intrusion, misinterpreted, political, ethnic, cultural, socio-economic differences/problems. Known or suspected criminal offenders.

Safety Standards (other work organisations, transport, hotels, etc), working at night, areas of high crime.

Ill health: personal considerations or vulnerabilities, pre-determined medical conditions (asthma, allergies, fitting) general fitness, disabilities, persons suited to task.

Articles and equipment: inappropriate type and/or use, failure of equipment, insufficient training for use and repair, injury.

Substances (chemicals, plants, bio- hazards, waste): ill health - poisoning, infection, irritation, burns, cuts, eye-damage.

Manual handling: lifting, carrying, moving large or heavy items, physical unsuitability for task

**If no hazard can be identified beyond those of everyday life, enter 'NONE'.**

1. LOCALITY/ROUTE	2. POTENTIAL HAZARDS
NONE	

*The University Fieldwork code of Practice booklet provides practical advice that should be followed in planning and conducting fieldwork.*

## **Risk Minimisation/Control Measures**

### **PLEASE READ VERY CAREFULLY**

For each hazard identified (**Col 2**), list the precautions/control measures in place or that will be taken (**Col 3**) to "**reduce the risk to acceptable levels**", and the safety equipment (**Col 5**) that will be employed.

Assuming the safety precautions/control methods that will be adopted (**Col. 3**), categorise the fieldwork risk for each location/route as negligible, low, moderate or high (**Col. 4**).

**Risk increases with both the increasing likelihood of an accident and the increasing severity of the consequences of an accident.**

**An acceptable level of risk is:** a risk which can be safely controlled by person taking part in the activity using the precautions and control measures noted including the necessary instructions, information and training relevant to that risk. The resultant risk should not be significantly higher than that encountered in everyday life.

#### **Examples of control measures/precautions:**

Providing adequate training, information & instructions on fieldwork tasks and the safe and correct use of any equipment, substances and personal protective equipment. Inspection and safety check of any equipment prior to use. Assessing individuals fitness and suitability to environment and tasks involved. Appropriate clothing, environmental information consulted and advice followed (weather conditions, tide times etc.). Seek advice on harmful plants, animals & substances that may be encountered, including information and instruction on safe procedures for handling hazardous substances. First aid provisions, inoculations, individual medical requirements, logging of location, route and expected return times of lone workers. Establish emergency procedures (means of raising an alarm, back up arrangements). Working with colleagues (pairs). **Lone working is not permitted where the risk of physical or verbal violence is a realistic possibility.** Training in interview techniques and avoiding /defusing conflict, following advice from local organisations, wearing of clothing unlikely to cause offence or unwanted attention. Interviews in neutral locations. Checks on Health and Safety standards & welfare facilities of travel, accommodation and outside organisations. Seek information on social/cultural/political status of fieldwork area.

**Examples of Safety Equipment:** Hardhats, goggles, gloves, harness, waders, whistles, boots, mobile phone, ear protectors, bright fluorescent clothing (for roadside work), dust mask, etc.

If a proposed locality has not been visited previously, give your authority for the risk assessment stated or indicate that your visit will be preceded by a thorough risk assessment.

<b>3. PRECAUTIONS/CONTROL MEASURES</b>	<b>4. RISK ASSESSMENT (low, moderate, high)</b>	<b>5. SAFETY/EQUIPMENT</b>
N/A		

## PLEASE READ INFORMATION OVERLEAF AND SIGN AS APPROPRIATE

**DECLARATION:** The undersigned have assessed the activity and the associated risks and declare that there is no significant risk or that the risk will be controlled by the method(s) listed above/over. Those participating in the work have read the assessment and will put in place precautions/control measures identified.

NB: Risk should be constantly reassessed during the fieldwork period and additional precautions taken or fieldwork discontinued if the risk is seen to be unacceptable.

**Signature of Fieldworker (Student/Staff)** .....Thomas Barber..... **Date** ...17.02.10

**Signature of Student Supervisor** .....Pnina Shinebourne..... **Date** ...31.05.10

### **APPROVAL:** (ONE ONLY)

**Signature of Director of Programmes**  
(undergraduate students only) ..... **Date** .....

**Signature of Research Degree Co-ordinator or Director of Programmes**  
(Postgraduate) ..... **Date** .....

**Signature of Research Centre Head** (for staff fieldworkers) ..... **Date** .....

## FIELDWORK CHECK LIST

1. Ensure that **all members** of the field party possess the following attributes (where relevant) at a level appropriate to the proposed activity and likely field conditions:

- ☐ Safety knowledge and training?
- ☐ Awareness of cultural, social and political differences?
- ☐ Physical and psychological fitness and disease immunity, protection and awareness?
- ☐ Personal clothing and safety equipment?
- ☐ Suitability of fieldworkers to proposed tasks?

2. Have all the necessary arrangements been made and information/instruction gained, and have the relevant authorities been consulted or informed with regard to:

- ☐ Visa, permits?
- ☐ Legal access to sites and/or persons?
- ☐ Political or military sensitivity of the proposed topic, its method or location?
- ☐ Weather conditions, tide times and ranges?
- ☐ Vaccinations and other health precautions?
- ☐ Civil unrest and terrorism?

- ☐ Arrival times after journeys?
- ☐ Safety equipment and protective clothing?
- ☐ Financial and insurance implications?
- ☐ Crime risk?
- ☐ Health insurance arrangements?
- ☐ Emergency procedures?
- ☐ Transport use?
- ☐ Travel and accommodation arrangements?

***Agreement has been obtained for use of The Turner Centre, Colchester; thus risk assessments/ health and safety standards have been undertaken.***

***A mutually agreed time for the interview will be organised and written confirmation of this plus location and travel options will be included.***

***Participants will be reimbursed for all travelling expenses.***

***My 0800 number will be included should there be any concerns or cancellation of the interview by the participant.***

**Important information for retaining evidence of completed risk assessments:**

Once the risk assessment is completed and approval gained the **supervisor** should retain this form and issue a copy of it to the fieldworker participating on the field course/work. In addition the **approver** must keep a copy of this risk assessment in an appropriate Health and Safety file.

## Appendix 3 Participant Information sheet

### Information Sheet

**Explosions:** A phenomenological exploration into the lived experience of 'uncontrollable' anger in men.

This is an exploration into the experience of moving from being in control, to feeling out of control of anger.

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully, and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take your time to decide whether or not you wish to participate. Deciding not to participate will not affect any assistance or support you get from agencies.

#### ***What is the purpose of the research?***

This research aims to explore what it is like in becoming angry and how this experience moves from being in control of this personal experience of anger, to where anger is deemed uncontrollable. The research looks to explore the thoughts and feelings that occur in this moment and also what happens in this moment.

It is hoped from this research greater understanding of anger will be gained and thus therapy and treatment for uncontrollable anger will be enhanced.

#### ***What will happen to you if you take part?***

You will be asked some questions from which you will have the chance to talk about and describe your experiences. This will last for no more than an hour and will take place at the Turner Centre, Head Street, Colchester. All your travelling expenses will be reimbursed. Our meeting will be taped for later transcription and analysis. You will remain anonymous throughout the research and recordings will be destroyed upon transcription. All materials will be kept under lock and key and will only be viewed by researcher, researcher's supervisor and the University markers/moderators.

#### ***Possible disadvantages and risks of you taking part***

As is possible in any exploration of ourselves with another, things that are being talked about can be upsetting and thought provoking. Please consider how you will feel talking about yourself and your experiences as this may be distressing.

There will be an opportunity at the end of the meeting to explore how you are feeling and you will have the opportunity of being put in contact with a therapist should you wish. I shall also be contacting you 2 weeks after our meeting to check how you are in the light of talking about yourself.

***Consent information***

You will be given a copy of the above information and asked to sign a consent form prior to taking part. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you decide to take part you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

***Who has reviewed this study?***

All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics committee before they can proceed. The Middlesex Psychology Department's Ethics Committee has reviewed this proposal.

**Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this research.**

**Tom Barber Doctoral Research**

New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling / Middlesex University

Researcher: Tom Barber – [info@tombarber.co.uk](mailto:info@tombarber.co.uk) – Tel: 0800 028 3071

Supervisor: Pnina Shinebourne

Contact at:

New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling

254-6 Belsize Road

London

[admin@nspc.org.uk](mailto:admin@nspc.org.uk)



## Appendix 4 Consent Form

Middlesex University School of Health and Social Science

Psychology Department

### Written informed consent

**Explosions:** A phenomenological exploration into the lived experience of ‘uncontrollable’ anger in men.

Researcher: Tom Barber

Supervisor: Pnina Shinebourne

I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher, and confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable, and I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.

I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication, and provide my consent that this may occur.

I understand that a recording is being made of this interview and will be securely stored until a verbatim transcript has been made

Print name:

Signature:

Date:

### Contact Details:

Tom Barber – [info@tombarber.co.uk](mailto:info@tombarber.co.uk) – Tel: 0800 028 3071

## Appendix 5 Interview Schedule

### Tom Barber Doctoral Research

New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling  
Middlesex University.

### Interview Schedule

Following a brief introduction, I will go through the consent form explaining the aims of the interview and research, what the participant will be asked to do, confidentiality, the right to pull out/stop the interview at any time.

#### Interview Questions:

**A pilot study will be conducted based on the following provisional questions. From this, there may well be amendments.**

- Can you describe one particular recent experience of what you might call ‘uncontrollable’ anger?  
Possible prompts: What happened? How did it start? How did it stop? How did you feel?
- When do you become aware that you are feeling angry?  
Possibly prompts: What do you notice that ‘changes’ in you in your experience of the ‘moment’?
- What thoughts do you recognise?  
Possible prompts: How does your thinking become in the moment of becoming angry?
- Where in your body do you feel angry?  
Possible prompts: Are there any parts of your body that you notice changes occurring? What does it feel like? What happens?
- How do you know you are losing control of your angry feelings?  
Possible prompts: What tells you that you have moved from being ‘in control’ to ‘out of control’?
- How do you think others see you when you are angry?  
Possible prompt: Do you have an image of yourself when you are angry?
- Can you tell me what you feel about talking to ‘me’ about being angry?

## Appendix 6 Debriefing Procedure

The aim of the debriefing is to ensure the participant leaves the research in as positive frame of mind as they had on entering.

1. Participants will be thanked and then asked how they found the experience.  
Prompt questions: What was it like? How do you feel now?
2. Researcher will ask if there is anything that has come up for the participant that has caused distress. If the answer is 'yes', the participant will be given the opportunity to explore it with the researcher where reassurance/open discussion can occur.
3. It will be explained to the participant that they might like to explore further in personal therapy. The general aims of therapy will be shared and the participant can have the choice if they would like the researcher to refer them to the Centre manager, who would be able to find them an appropriate therapist.
4. It will be explained that in 2 weeks' time the researcher will contact them again via email or phone to again see how the participant is, in the light of the interview.

### **Debriefing Sheet**

Many thanks for taking part in this research. After the interview you will have had time to discuss anything that has come up for you in the light of our exploration.

You will also be contacted (unless you say otherwise) by the researcher 2 weeks post interview to make sure that nothing further in the light of our meeting has caused you any concern.

There is an opportunity to be referred to one of the Centres therapist if you wish.

If after you leave the interview, you feel troubled by what you have shared, please don't hesitate to contact me via email [info@tombarber.co.uk](mailto:info@tombarber.co.uk) or by telephone on 0800 028 3071.

Thank you again for helping with this research.

#### **Contact Details:**

Tom Barber – [info@tombarber.co.uk](mailto:info@tombarber.co.uk) – Tel: 0800 028 3071

## Appendix 7 Developing Themes

**Table excerpt from anonymised transcript (Ben)**

Exploratory Comments	Original Transcript	Emerging Themes
<p>Girls drive me crazy.</p> <p>I got a sense that his 'girl' was his, like he had a sense of owning her. She could break his heart, and his heart was tender, despite his 'bravado'.</p> <p>He seemed keen to show that he grew up with having to be strong, emotionally, not being able to be embarrassed. I felt a longing to not to have to be this way, like it was something to be proud of, but not his pride. It was the way thing were back then.</p> <p>He has the ability to be hurt by her words or when his 'girl' world is threatened.</p> <p>Crazy again.</p> <p>There seems a real sense of injustice here. She's hurt me, 'I can't believe it', and so now he goes off on one.</p> <p>Smashing stereos, throwing drawers.</p> <p>It's like the whole episode sends him into 'overdrive, like there's no stopping it, and</p>	<p>B: Right, erm, basically, its girls, girls drive me crazy. The thing is with my girl, she can say anything she wants to me and it don't really wind me up, because all my life, when I used to go to school I used to get bullied and that, and my dad obviously, like, he's the type of man where you can't afford to get embarrassed, do you know what I mean, he's not a piss taker but always cracking jokes.</p> <p>B: You can't get embarrassed, so things don't embarrass me, they don't bother me, but when she calls me a prick, but when she says to me, I've seen this guy or done that, it just sends me crazy, basically we were just rowing over, ...</p> <p>B: She started getting the hump and taking the piss all night, and then we had a row about one of her ex-blokes and then basically she told me she was with him all night, so I went round there to get my stuff, and then I thought, I bought her a £150 stereo and she gets right in my face, and she's so heartless, and then I grab the stereo and just throw it against the wall.</p> <p>Smashed the stereo, started saying things about her, threw a chest of drawers over, and then</p>	<p>The triggers.</p> <p>The noise - auditory and physically (internal, external).</p>

<p>something has to take its course. I feel like I'm hearing somebody describe this reaction, like even he can't believe it. Its feels bravado, but I get the sense he's shocked at the reaction. He sounds both proud, yet overwhelmed.</p> <p>Crazy one.</p> <p>The anger seems to come in waves, but I get the sense that it doesn't grow, just perpetuates, and could go on and on, if he had the energy.</p> <p>"I put my trainers on" resonated with me. It's kind of an unspoken message. If you put your trainers on, you mean business, and usually that involves conflict with another, violence, or an argument. I smiled inwardly at the inference, which was taken as understood!</p> <p>Lose it like a switch, have the hump, proper angry. He flips and will do anything.</p> <p>Killing, smashing, burning, switching and taking on a million men.</p> <p>This was a powerful moment. His tone was</p>	<p>she started slapping me up, and I had to just push her away from me, obviously, she was screaming and shouting and then I left and then I started to have a crazy one outside, drove off and that was it, then she's texting me and calling me, and then er, I went back there, because she had my cards, when we were scuffling, she took my credit cards and all the stuff out my pockets, so I've gone back there for them, and she's hidden them, so then I was getting the hump again, and then we were just scuffling again, and then I was so tired, it was like 4am, I just laid on the bed and just conked out, woke up in the morning, got my cards and just left. That was it.</p> <p>B: The minute she told me what she said to the other bloke, I put my trainers on and got in the car.</p> <p>T: So if you just imagine freezing that. The moment you heard that, what did you notice changed inside you?</p> <p>B: What do you mean, how your body goes? Or how your mind goes?</p> <p>T: Yeah, you jumped up and ...</p> <p>B: Put it this way right, when I get angry right, I just lose it, like a switch, when I'm proper angry. I can have the hump and I can be stressed and I can be snappy and then but once I lose it, that's me gone. When I flip, it's the worst you can imagine. It's just, I'll do anything.</p> <p>T: What goes through your mind? What thoughts do you recognise?</p> <p>B: Killing, smashing the world up, anything, do you know what I mean. Burning the place down. When it goes that far and switches, I'll</p>	<p>What happens in his head - Invincible</p>
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<p>venomous, serious, like again he wanted me to know the extent he would go to in the retribution of his anger.</p> <p>He flips and it's the worst imaginable.</p> <p>The Hulk ... takes on a million men.</p>	<p>take on a million men. I'll fight anyone, I'll do anything to them, I'll do the most, in my head I'll do the sickest thoughts you could imagine, without no regret.</p> <p>Put it this way right, when I get angry right, I just lose it, like a switch, when I'm proper angry. I can have the hump and I can be stressed and I can be snappy and then but once I lose it, that's me gone. When I flip, it's the worst you can imagine.</p> <p>B: My whole body goes, I feel like the Hulk, that's how I feel. That's why when it switches I feel like I could take on a million men. Like when she was slapping me, she was going some and I was not even noticing it, and I was holding her by the throat and she's just going bang, bang, bang [hitting him] and I just pushed her away, I just didn't think, yeah.</p>	<p>The acceleration and process – The switch of the anger experience.</p> <p>His physical experience of anger – his metamorphosis, transmutation.</p>
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## Appendix 8 Table of Emerging Themes for Individual Participants

### Table of Themes – *Ben*

Emerging Themes
<p><b>“Crazy Angry”</b>  <i>The triggers.</i></p> <p><b>“The minute I’ve lost it the screaming comes”</b>  <i>The noise - auditory and physically (internal, external).</i></p> <p><b>“I just lose it, like a switch ... like nitrous on a car ... like boom!”</b>  <i>The acceleration and process – The switch of the anger experience.</i></p> <p><b>“When it goes that far and switches, I’ll take on a million men.”</b>  <i>What happens in his head – Invincible.</i></p> <p><b>“I feel like the Hulk”</b>  <i>His physical experience of anger – his metamorphosis, transmutation.</i></p> <p><b>“I was just nutting them like a nutter ... I have to do something”</b>  <i>What he does.</i></p>

### Theme Overview – *Ben*

<p><b>1. “Crazy Angry.”</b></p> <p><i>The triggers.</i></p> <p>For Ben, there’s anger and then there’s crazy anger! He appears to describe the anger experience, and what then pushes him over the ‘edge’ by using the definition ‘crazy’. He can have the ‘hump’, be stressed, but then something else happens. It becomes crazy.</p> <p>Girls drive him crazy, what his girlfriend says to him drives him crazy, when he gets himself out of a difficult situation; he leaves ... to have a crazy one. Threats to his family get him to his craziest, such as if it was his brother involved in an argument; he then becomes a crazy ‘nutter’. When he gets to the sobbing stage, he’s at his craziest. Nothing stops him then.</p> <p>His descriptions of becoming crazy also denote then his process, his leaving the situation to do something, his ‘going’, losing it, losing the plot. It’s the pinnacle of his experience. Nothing tops it for him.</p> <p>This craziness holds the lunatic within him, and this lunatic could rip another person apart or ‘rip the shit’ out of them, describing the pure ferocity of this ‘crazy’ lived experience.</p>
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## **2. “The minute I've lost it the screaming comes.”**

*The noise - auditory and physically (internal, external).*

There feels like a ‘loudness’ to Ben’s anger experience, possibly not just the sound of noise, but a kind of change to the *texture* of his external world too. The screaming, the shouting, the wheel spinning, Ben saying things, others saying things, him up being ‘slapped up’, the smashing, the throwing, Ben losing it. It’s all so very loud.

A shaking precipitates the screaming. He shouts at the top of his voice, as loud as he can, losing it, screaming ... and ‘everything’, as he’s had enough and goes “off his nut”. He disengages from his own *screaming self*, imagining another doing the same, and sees them amusingly... like a nutter.. From the screaming and shouting there’s then an escalation, something inside him ‘goes’, he leaves, leading into sobbing, not just crying, but sobbing, sobbing his eyes out, noisily.

He describes situations that lead to this place, like his ‘bird’ being with another man, or him even thinking this. It’s like he’s thinking ‘everything’ at once, with no room left, and it sounds jam packed. It’s like the screaming ... everything ... descends upon him, from inside. It has a feel of Munch's famous *Scream*, which when looking at it has no sound, but conjures like a whirlwind a ghastly noise from somewhere cavernously deep within.

## **3. “I just lose it ... I switch ... like nitrous on a car ... like boom!”**

*The acceleration and process – The switch of the anger experience.*

When Ben gets angry he loses it, like a switch is flicked, and then he gets ‘proper’ angry, by which he ‘means’ angry ... really angry. There’s a kind of ‘everydayness’, or existential ‘mood’ or mode of ‘being in the world’ about him having the hump, or being stressed or snappy. This describes his “normal cylinder”, which appears to extend to a ‘normal angry’ state ... and then - there’s all hell breaking loose .. *proper anger*. He goes into ‘thinking overdrive’; is then gone and flips and it can’t get any worse.

The build-up happens, and then comes the fear, as ordinarily he’s scared of the ‘smallest guy’, but after this, after his ‘small tank’ is spent, he experiences a shaking inside him, leading to him getting ‘into it’ and then whatever happens is what appears as necessary. If he’s losing in a fight then he can ‘flip’ with magnificent nitrous fuelled propulsion - a boom! That takes him to his only focused aim, winning. Even though he knows the fear he carries, and hears in his head - “Don’t do it, don’t do it”, when the switch is flicked, his personal inner ‘crazy nutter’ makes its entrance and runs amok, without a care (he says) as to the outcome.

Yet, still some line remains for Ben, a kind of indicator, a flicking back of his ‘switch’, that only certain people seem able to operate, such as his ‘girl’, or his father. These people appear to be able to stop him in an instant, as though from within the ‘mist’, ‘they’ are able to reach ‘him’.

## **4. “I’ll take on a million men.”**

*What happens in his head – Invincible.*



There are no limits in this place for Ben; even a million men could not faze him - he's invincible. The sickest things can happen in his head; he can do it all ... and there will be no regret. When I sit with this potential, 'it' feels fearsome, awesome even. I'm stunningly sold, and cold and I feel it within *me*, as a part of me feels scared for myself, in a world where this level of carnage is possible.

Anything can happen for him, and to others. They could get the "shit ripped out of them", or just plain "ripped apart". When he's had enough, all he wants to do is get hold of them. Killing, smashing the world up, burning the place down ... "that's it now" for him ... He can fight 'anyone'. It's all on the table. I have a sense that given more time, he could elaborate more eloquently on the limits he could envisage; the potential of his anger.

Ben describes going to 'war', which really captures the magnitude of his anger experience, and the consequences that can arise out of his anger reaction. For him it doesn't matter who you are, or however many of you there are. He'll do anything, and he'll do 'whatever' is required. He'll take on a million men if need be. He describes losing it, "that's me gone", off on one, with the quality of really leaving himself, to the degree where he doesn't even feel the pain or think about what's happening to him. In this place he really does "lose the plot".

##### **5. "I feel like the Hulk."**

*His physical experience of anger – his metamorphosis, transmutation.*

As I listen to Ben describe his movement into his angry state I am taken back years to weekly television episodes of the Incredible Hulk. It feels like I'm watching Bruce Banner begin his transformation from calm, easy going guy, to a monster. Ben himself describes feeling like the "hulk". He knows his 'calm' place, or as he describes it "half calm", but thoughts like "my bird being with another man, or other men even thinking of doing something with her" push him over the edge. People telling him to calm down is in no way helpful and just fuels his frustration. All he wants to do is hurt somebody more than.

From not even noticing his 'girl' slapping him, really "going some", with complete numbness, no pain whatsoever, except perhaps from a kind of dizziness, he experiences his body going numb, his body 'goes', and then there's the fear as the 'build up' happens, and then the shaking. I have visions of him turning green! He wants to get out of it, but he physically pumps up, his whole body tensing and he feels stronger than 'anything' and the Hulk is here, that's how he feels for him, and me. It's weird for him but he knows this process well it seems, losing the plot. A part of though him wants me to know that he's not all that bad – "I know I sound like I'm violent, but I'm not. I am violent but I'm not. I don't go out looking for trouble" he tells me ... "I would never have hurted her though. As much as I wanted to I never would," he reiterates.

And then comes 'the shiver' which feels powerful for him, the nerves, and then the crying and at this point I feel a sadness come over me, as if I'm watching again the end of an episode of the Incredible Hulk, with the sorrow of his infliction. He can break down and cry, cry his eyes out and it's the worst thing for him, partly as he struggles to know what the tears are about – "why am I sad about everything. I'm never sad about anything!" For him he just gets angry, breaks down and then comes the tears, the sobbing. It can happen out of the blue, this part of him, over nothing.

And as it subsides he lays down, like the Hulk at the end of his rampage, ‘conks out’, wakes up and leaves, or he exacts a lower level of anger, just ‘chinning’ somebody, not ripping them apart, that’s too much, and this lowers the level and Ben (Bruce) returns. Just like the Hulk, it’s a time thing, and a distance thing. I’m left feeling a depth of sorrow for how this unfolds. Bens anger feels like an affliction, and like the Hulk, he’s relieved when it’s over.

**6. “I was just nutting them like a nutter ... I have to do something.”**

*What he does.*

This might just start with Ben “putting his trainers on”, a wonderfully symbolic way of saying, ‘Right, I mean business’, after his ‘girl’ tells him she’s been speaking with another man.

This seems like the low end of Ben’s mounting animation during his anger experience, his constant movement, and what he does when he’s angry. Something has to happen, and that relates to his moving level of anger. As he describes smashing a stereo against the wall, I can visualise him doing it, as he shouts and directs his verbal anger against his ‘girl’. It feels like the throwing of the chest of drawers just rolls into the whole experience, like it’s nothing special, nothing out of the ordinary, just a part of it. She “slaps him up” and he has to push her away. Every action creates a reaction it feels, as something has to happen. It even spills outside to a continuation of the ‘crazy one’, which continues even further again in his driving off, there still a need for something to happen, movement, a dynamic expression of his current angry worldview.

His car gets it, his “poor car”. He has an attachment here - he’ll wheel spin “the granny out of it” as he has to do something, but ‘feels’ for this poor inanimate object. There appears a moment in time here, where he steps out of it and reflects.

Doors get kicked down; indeed he hits doors so hard they fall off, with his fists, or he just head-butts them “like a nutter”. His anger has to go somewhere, the dynamic has a story to unfold, whether it’s the doors or the walls he ‘nut’s”. He just wants to smash everything. He adds some sound too, shouting, as that helps, as does having a brandy, or a bottle.

In all this movement though, it isn’t just smashing and breaking and ripping and ‘nutting’, but crying that happens as well. It’s not all about destruction, just movement, expulsion, discharge. It’s his anger dynamic. He can go off and cry and calm down. He drives off, parks up and cries, there’s so much anger. But it has to go somewhere, it can’t just be, it has a process.

## Table of Themes – *Adrian*

### Emerging Themes

**“Gale force. Enough said. It pisses me right off from the start.”**

*The anger provoker.*

**“What is the point?”**

*His thoughts.*

**“It’s just boom.”**

*His reactions.*

**“My heads goes a little bit ... and my fists start clenching ... my stomach gets heavier.”**

*Bodily sensations.*

**“I remember the before, I remember the after, I don’t remember the middle. I black out.”**

*His disengagement.*

**“All hell lets loose.”**

*Controlling his anger.*

**“I just switch complete personality.”**

*How others see him when he is angry.*

**“I don’t talk to anyone.”**

*His historical sense of self.*

## Theme Overview – *Adrian*

### 1. **“Gale force. Enough said. It pisses me right off from the start.”**

*The anger provoker.*

Adrian started with a description of getting “pissed off” today, on the day of the interview. It’s very fresh in his mind as it’s ‘just’ happened. He got angry by being talked to as if he were an idiot. The other person was rude to him, and his response was to start swearing.

There feels like a deletion of time in his story. He gets spoken to rudely, and swears. But that wasn’t the entire story, but a very short paraphrase of it. He hung up the telephone first on the person who was he felt being rude to him, so there is something else that happened here inside him and its complexity feel conspicuous in the absence of its description right at the start of the interview. There appears a separation between what he was doing - “Just asking questions” - and then what the other person said. Nevertheless he felt he was being disrespected, and the response he got from the other irritated him. Adrian judged it as ‘pig ignorant’ and this led to him being ‘pissed off’.

I drift into wondering what ‘existential feeling’ or ‘mood’ this draws him into. He uses the term “pissed off” often to describe his anger, with variations of ‘pissed me *right* off’ and ‘*completely* pissed off’. Also he describes a ‘bubbling up’. It’s like he almost becomes aware in the interview of just *how* pissed off he was as he describes his feelings.

Primarily Adrian’s anger centres around the other person’s attitude towards him, which got to him – Their tone, ignorance and being difficult with him. He explains what the other person was saying, and how he was *just* asking a standard question, but I feel so much more going on underneath. I get the sense that this isn’t the first time this has happened to him. He sounds surprised but I find myself imagining it’s happened before.

Adrian uses ‘flipping’ as the changing process of him becoming angry. He gives an example of him flipping when reaching a level of irritation is by hearing his Dad tell him one thing after another, as

in telling him over and over again. He also gives a description of the levels or degrees of anger – in his case irritation being worse than anger.

I feel his sense of ‘wrongness’ in the room by the ‘other’ that has made him angry in their disrespectful attitude, and it really gets to him, like “gale force style - enough said.” He uses these descriptions to portray the enormity of the reaction he has to being treated disrespectfully. This seems to be the reaction he has if somebody talks to him like he’s stupid. Adrian’s defenses go straight up he explains. He gets angry in the room as he describes this. I sense he hears himself say what he’s said and it really confirms what gets to him – being talked to like an idiot, because he knows he’s not an idiot! He says he’s done some stupid things in the past, but that he knows this doesn’t make him an idiot. He recalls though a time when he seems to have dealt with the ‘idiot’ term being thrown at him. He couldn’t retaliate as the one calling him this was his boss. Ordinarily I imagine this would have sent him into “gale force” anger though.

## **2. “What is the point?”**

*His thoughts.*

Adrian’s thoughts point towards the other and he uses colourful derogatory words to sum them up. What’s the point in their behavior? He asks himself. I hear him feeling he’s been on the end of some injustice. This is his summing up of his OWN state. Pissed off again. He has a real sense of being treated unfairly. The person called HIM, not the other way round, so how could this happen? It seems incredulous. Adrian withdraws when he feels so hard done by in this way.

He has a train of thoughts that seems to help him ‘sort’ the situation out in his head. He can’t be bothered, there’s no point. They are wasting his time and being rude, and he’s not being rude - ‘they are’. He seems strongly to define theirs and his part in the experience and proportions the blame firmly with the other. He becomes irritated very early on as he appears to get a sense that the whole conversation, him just doing his job, is going to be as irritating. He has a questionnaire to ask and knows he has to do it, and what response he’s going to get. It feels like to me this isn’t the first time. We see that this is a common train of thought for him. It isn’t just this incident.

There is a shift in this of his perspective as his thoughts move from being positive to negative. Adrian was angry and whatever the person said, it was going to irritate him. It doesn’t matter what he says, it could be anything, as it seems he’s past a point. It moves from what the person is saying *to* him to him being annoyed by the person themselves, including how they sound. He can’t understand this other person’s stance and he struggles to have any space for anything else it seems.

From then Adrian starts to retaliate and becomes aggressive. He’s been told this anyway... by other people, a lot of them. Whilst he becomes aggressive he also describes a losing of passion and energy, wanting to get it over with, escape off the phone and put it behind him and move on. I see that underneath his irritation is a kind of pointlessness of the conversation, as it is. It’s driven by an outcome that means if it doesn’t go his way, there is no financial reason for him continuing. It feels quite futile when I think of this situation; quite power sucking.

Adrian describes his anger on the worst occasions as a quite a simple process, and then possibly sheds some light on the lack of apparent true meaning held with his “oh, sorry” statement, telling me how he feels lacking in remorse for the degree to which he ‘loses it’. I find this part confusing, as he seems to be saying that his lack of remorse is because he couldn’t actually be sure what he was being told he’d done in this ‘in between’ black out of anger, was true? I feel suspicion in me here, and I feel uneasy as I see a real distancing in his self from his behavior. It takes a lot to get him to that stage of really angry though. Irritation though can happen in a second. Anger to the blackout stage builds up and up.

## **3. “It’s just boom.”**

### *His reactions.*

When Adrian switches into angry mode he begins to start swearing, which lasts for 20 seconds. It feels like a tirade if I imagine being in front of him. I'm unsure when he then describes this lasting for a minute, as this feels like a long time, and there seems a lot left out from his description, from the three thoughts he's described. I wonder if he is referring to how long he *felt* angry, more so that how long the tirade lasted for. Adrian leaves the situation, and stops feeling angry, and this possibly coincides with him going off to do some work.

He not only leaves but starts to smoke cigarettes and then he considers that then he is all right. I'm wondering if he knows the point at which he starts to stop feeling angry or if this is a common chain of events, walking out and then smoking. Adrian uses the word boom! (As did another participant).

It is such a rich word. It conjures up for me a supersonic boom from an airplane. That matches the 'tirade'. I get a stronger sense of this tirade as a tornado, visiting with its power and anger, and then it's gone. Here it is that the disengagement seems to happen - *it's not his fault*. It's like anger 'happens' to him, it's not 'his' fault, so he can blame it on somebody else. It's not his fault as he doesn't know, or can't remember what happened in the 'in between' anger experience. I find myself getting frustrated at this point with what feels like a total denial of responsibility for his emotion.

- 4. "My heads goes a little bit ... and my fists start clenching ... my stomach gets heavier."**

### *Bodily sensations.*

Adrian begins to feel angry in the pit of his stomach when the anger comes. The feeling is his stomach is a heavy feeling and then he describes how his hands seem to start clenching. He describes this as if (again) it happens to him, not that 'he' clenches his fists. He describes what 'he' does with his hands when he's getting angry, opening and clenching them and gives me a demonstration. In his stomach he describes again the heaviness but then also how the heaviness accompanies pain. He (referring to his 'you' example) gets worked up in this process. He connects the clenching and unclenching of his fists, which others would see if he was getting annoyed, to a higher blood pressure. He feels it particularly in his knuckles, and along with his stomach he also feels a light headedness. It feels a really dizzy experience as I imagine it.

- 5. "I remember the before, I remember the after, I don't remember the middle. I black out."**

### *His disengagement.*

Past this point when Adrian reaches 'really angry', then he describes how he 'blacks out' (the 'in-between' described earlier). This 'black out' means when he's had a fight; he will never remember what's happened. He thinks the blackout could be to do with his light headedness. If he gets pushed too much, then the blackout will happen and then after that he calms down and 'comes back'. It seems like other people can push him into this place. There feels like a 'space, or place' inside this black out as I imagine putting myself there. When he 'comes back' it like when waking up in the morning.

He sounds almost surprised when people ask him about remembering what's happened when he blacks out. He can't. I find myself questioning this – can this really be so? There are occasions then when this doesn't happen, this black out, but it's rare. Flipping out in anger is how he describes it. He *flipped* in his house and was then outside? Like he was transported there! Adrian thinks he's

lucky not to remember what's happened, as he gets told he goes too far, and he doesn't have much else to say apart from 'oh, sorry', which appears as not very 'meant', I guess as he doesn't know what he's done it's like he has no connection to it.

#### **6. "All hell lets loose."**

*Controlling his anger.*

Here Adrian describes the 'window' that is *available* to calm him down before he gets too irritated. It's Just a split second and then 'all hell lets loose'. He says he knows how to calm down, but it sounds like as he explain this incident that he knows more about from what others can *do* to calm him down, rather than being in control of it.

Moving his focus away from the situation calms him down, and he then feels the anger pushing back down.

#### **7. "I just switch complete personality."**

*How others see him when he is angry.*

Others see Adrian in his anger, when he can't remember anything and they call him an asshole, and (surprisingly) and idiot! - and a "fucking nutter". It seems people are really surprised by the difference in him when he gets 'pissed off' and angry. The switch happens in his personality. He's nice and then he loses it, and he is unrecognizable. He can't see himself as angry. He could if he looked in the mirror, but he can't see himself, or 'imagine' himself even. I get a little stuck here with this. It feels like he doesn't want to, or even try. It's interesting, his use of 'everyone', like it is a collective awareness of his calmness. It's rare for him to get angry, and I imagine it takes people very much by surprise. I'm also struck by the 'get me' angry comment, like it would have to be somebody to get him angry, like it comes again from outside, not from inside him.

#### **8. "I don't talk to anyone."**

*His historical sense of self.*

Adrian's really surprised at how he has explained the anger experience. I feel his surprise. This gets a little too close for comfort to the childhood issues he has shut away (his own description). Opening up for him equates to 'losing it' ... a common expression of his. I wonder if he would at some level like to 'open up' more, or connect more, if only it weren't so scary, or revealing.

### **Table of Themes – Josh**

#### **Emerging Themes**

**"It doesn't matter who's there or what it's gonna mean."**

*Consequences.*

**"I have to have the last word and I have to end it on my terms."**

*My way.*

**"It's the feeling of losing control"**

*Keeping it in – His reactions/feelings.*

**“It’s like a rush.”**

*The body feeling and sensations.*

**“It’s that point like when you’re doomed.”**

*The separation of responsibility - Or disembodiment.*

**“Just walk off, I’m allowed this minute, I’m due this minute.”**

*It’s My Anger - His thoughts.*

## Theme Overview – Josh

### 1. “It doesn’t matter who’s there or what it’s gonna mean.”

*Consequences.*

There is a sense here of Josh blowing up and down, with some sense of regularity, which shows later on – Every other day. There’s a real statement here - None of this matters, when he’s angry, nobody or no consequences. It feels really wanton. But Josh is also keen to make it known that he doesn’t do anything, that he’s not violent. But he WILL say things! Again, it doesn’t matter the consequences or with whom, he just comes out with something. He gives me an example of his placid nature and reasonableness! It’s interesting his mother comes into this. It was unexpected for me, yet I resonate with the gauge of who he could offend and who definitely he would not want to upset.

### 2. “I have to have the last word and I have to end it on my terms.”

*My way.*

I see the speed at which this process can happen now. Like it’s out of the blue, all of a sudden. There feels a real sense of righteousness here. “You” make me feel that way, or annoy me and you DESERVE the consequences of my anger Josh says. In this place of anger, it’s an absolute requirement that he has the last word. That it ends on his terms. There’s no other possibility, or he’ll just simply remain angry. When I imagine myself in an argument with him, it feels like until this happens it could go on for all eternity. I get more of a sense of him here, as he tells me his limits and how we won’t put up with things, even if it’s difficult. He wants to be heard. It feels like he has been toying with his descriptions of his responses, and now here, he becomes more direct.

Josh talks about this more later, but it’s an interesting statement. I don’t feel surprised but it sounds a little strange. A set time of being angry? This is part of the process. I get a sense that Josh, in an argument, would go on and on and on, until they agree with him. It could last forever. He really needs to be right, and won’t stop until they agree and he’s then ‘right’. There’s a kind of backing down of the other that seems to satisfy him. Josh shows here a sense of knowing how ‘safe’ he is to take it (so what he’d say) to another level. It’s about how comfortable he is.

The amount he’d say comes into it – One sentence for knowing somebody for only one week Vs. twenty minutes of tangent for family. The more he knows someone the more he is able to say, and the longer he’s able to say it! This is what he needs to do, and getting it off his chest feels ‘better’. There’s a real ‘holding’ here of the anger. Like, ‘someone NEEDS to get it, but it can wait’ I find myself smiling at this. It feels calculated. I don’t find HIM calculating, but this does have a feel of that. Maybe I see something deeper? It feels like a ‘set up’! A ‘test’.

It's like this is his way of continuation. I get a sense Josh met his match in his girlfriend here. For me the thought of arguing with him feels futile. I see again here that the 'last word' is really important to him. He has to keep going and going, even reverting to arguing with himself so he could keep going in the face of her (his girlfriends) silence.

Even though he keeps going, the predominant thought is that she needs to hear him, and it angers him more if he thinks she is not, or his message isn't going in. I get a sense again that this would continue indefinitely if she didn't stop and sit in silence (or at least appear to be), but it's not good enough for him. He can do this for up to thirty minutes! I imagine being worn down by him and giving up.

### **3. "It's the feeling of losing control"**

*Keeping it in – His reactions/feelings.*

Although Josh doesn't say, I read that his inner language would be worse if it were a major argument. Just thinking "fuck off" wouldn't be enough. Josh shows a real process of control here. He won't put up with it and would say something if he felt offended, but also has a part that is respectful. He tones his response down in relation to who he's dealing with. There is some element of control here with certain people and there are consequences to expressing anger with certain other people. He bites his tongue again! It's a phrase Josh uses a lot.

It's interesting that 'something' has to happen. 'They' have to listen, 'they' have to understand, or another strategy is that he can make himself feel something else, here in this instance ... guilt. In this moment, he almost stands back and judges *himself* as arrogant, and he knows there is no getting through to him – it's impossible. I get a feeling again of Josh stepping outside of himself and seeing how it is dealing with him from the others perspective. If the other person is as pissed off as he is then it's not as bad – They've heard him, or that's how he organises it in his thoughts. I see the polarities of that impossibility in Josh's behaviour when he gets angry. From 'easy going' to 'real prick'. This sounds like very deprecating behaviour, or it's where it takes me. The latter is an interesting choice of term, as it says so much, yet doesn't define anything. I have a sense of what it is for him though, thoroughly distasteful behaviour, or he becomes his behaviour. Maybe 'real prick' is this - aggressive.

Josh can see himself. I get a sense of him looking at himself, aggressive, and becoming a bit red in his face, and the tenseness feels 'felt'. He confirms this as he looks at himself, and with what he sees Josh can gauge how far on the scale he is to losing control of his behaviour and that turning to violence. But – there also feels something quite controlled. He's going to lose it – but NEVER does. Yeah, they think, "fucking hell, he's gonna go at any minute", but he NEVER does.

### **4. "It's like a rush."**

*The body feeling.*

Josh shares his inner voice of reason appearing. He mentions over-reacting, like he did being "harsh". I get a sense of the indignation. His anger is alongside his impatience, and then what happens? He can't tolerate this, indeed he 'wont'. I get a feel of 'the cheek of it' he uses in T22 before he even says it. This is a physical feeling and Josh has an image here. An idea of what adrenaline might feel like. He mentions 'not' seeing red again. It's interesting that he uses a powerful metaphor, but only in a way that describes what he 'wouldn't' do.

I'm not ready for Josh's description! It feels dramatic even, but for me he has 'appeared' as 'in' the experience, and when I ask him where (the rush is) in his body, he takes a kind of dissociative stance. I'm sucked into object/subject and Sartre's The Look.



He steps outside, looks at himself and then pinpoints it. In his chest, but only he 'supposes' - I'm not convinced, and then he says it! ... his tongue, his mouth - and now "biting his tongue" makes absolute sense. He acknowledges it, and he feels 'back' to me. It is his chest where the physical feeling is felt, but the expulsion of the anger comes via his mouth. Josh mentions the rush again and also he feels the blood pumping, faster.

**5. "It's that point like when you're doomed."**

*The separation of responsibility – Disembodiment.*

Maybe 'real prick' is this - aggressive. And he has no control over it, either what he says or even does. I'm curious at this accentuation, like this really IS out of his control. He's keen here to reiterate that it's verbal though, not physical, because that's better. 'An' anger, not his anger, but 'an' anger. This feels like a separation, and then follows the 'just can't help it' statement. It's not him, it just comes over him, and he cannot help but do something. It's just what happens 'to' him. It feels as though this is a regular function for him. A lingering mood even, that being 'right' settles him. Maybe he's not aware of it all the time, but it's there in the background.

I see here again a fabulous description of what Josh is 'not' going to do. I wonder if this happens in his head in the moment? It's not like he'll lose control, start throwing things, just ... like he's going to go mad! Mad as in inside mad, not demonstrative mad? I feel ambiguity, and now I say this I have a sense of an ambiguity that has permeated throughout his description/discourse.

Doomed - This is an incredible line for me. I feel it encapsulates for me the entire experience of Josh. 'I can't help it' - 'it just comes out of my hand!?' Such a separation of responsibility. I'm drawn into 'mineness' and how Josh sits with this. His whole tone here was that this would just happen (?) A question mark proceeds each action (the phone, the pen), like "how did that happen!?" But then he absolves himself from being seen as doing this 'purposely'. HE wouldn't do something bad in like actually engaging with this action. He wouldn't be a part of this strange occurrence. It's a fascinating and exciting piece of discourse. Doomed. There's no way back. It's such a powerful word. There's no clawing back from here, just **doom**.

**6. "Just walk off, I'm allowed this minute, I'm due this minute."**

*It's My Anger - His thoughts.*

Josh makes a really interesting comment in that when he calms down and him and his girlfriend discuss his anger behaviour (I feel drawn to saying his 'outburst') that he calmly agrees he was (in her eyes) a 'prick', but it has to go somewhere, somebody has to 'take it off him'.

I have a sense of the righteousness appearing again, but it's less than that, it's a lack of appreciation of him, a feeling of injustice he gets. All she saw was the bad in him in his eyes. And this is the consequences, where it takes him - "Fuck off, what's her fucking problem" is in his head. It feels ferocious, biting, and indignant. He hates her, in that moment, but then feels that his reaction is a little harsh. It doesn't to me!? What happens then in him? He feels bad for feeling angry? It's like it just happened, this thought? It just popped up from a void? Like it suddenly 'happened' to him.

There's a sense here of how he holds it, and he has to wait until she is no longer there and then he's able to think what's there in his thoughts. And here's his inner voice of reason appearing. He mentions over-reacting, like he did being "harsh". I get a sense of the indignation again here. His anger is alongside his impatience, and then what happens? He can't tolerate this, indeed he 'wont'. I get a feel of 'the cheek of it' before he even says it. It isn't so much about the under appreciation, but the lack of respect, the other 'taking the piss'. "Who do you think you are!" comes to me. He hasn't said it, but it feels like a term that's present.

As Josh's anger subsides I get a sense again of him becoming passive, not wanting the boat rocked. Putting things into a lighter perspective – and then I have a closer feeling towards the “little blow ups” he mentions. I get more sight of how they work. This feels like a “blow up”. Something also feels important here though in so much that he had to get his point across, to say what he needed to, and so the blow up winds down and he thinks more ‘rationally?’

He reiterates that getting his point across, this is what's important. He feels better for this. This feels a little different. It's not just that he's got his point across, but that they've *understood* him, his point of view. They have to know it, and until then - he remains angry. So it's not just about getting it out, it's that he *knows* they have got it, taken it in. Only then does he feel better.

Josh notices a change when he feels like he's losing control, just a little bit, and he quantifies losing control, with not ‘actually’ ... really losing control, as that would mean smashing the place up. There feels here a sense of a knowing that he's on his way to saying something that he shouldn't, but caution is thrown to the wind, its coming out anyway. The thoughts come all together, and again there's an element of the degree, not ‘seeing red’ (not really losing it and smashing), but losing control, just a bit – which feels a paradoxical description.

Getting it out leads to feeling better, and until its out it remains ‘in there’ winding him up. He has a kind of tentativeness about the whole process. It rests on a line, and it's got to come out. He describes again that he's got to get his point across, for him – and the other persons got to understand. This is so important to him. He really labours this, like he wants ‘me’ to understand that he has to get his point across. It's like he has to make his point to me in this.

Josh describes a really interesting process in this place. He ‘puts’ them in his shoes – ‘makes’ them look at his point, and ‘shouts’ his point across, that's the only way. They **MUST** get it and he's going to ‘make’ them. I start to feel oppressed at this point. I feel like I have no room to think. It's easier to become mute, as he's going to do his thing no matter what! I feel like there's no point – just agree.

It seems that just saying something harsh, and going a bit too far with his reactions, calms him down, yet he knows it's too far, and feels guilty for it, yet it's almost a strategy. It shows here how his anger revisits him, and how it then subsides. It's not long lasting, and he doesn't appear to hold a grudge for too long, and it's only momentarily where he loses control.

“Make sure you're not around me .... Just walk off” Josh says however, when he describes losing it. This feels really powerful. This is his warning. This is *his* anger and he's allowed it. He is *due* it – it's entirely reasonable for him to feel this, so don't question it! There is such a powerful feeling behind this.

Josh becomes aware of how his self-description and seems to come right into the now and aware of me. I wasn't expecting this. I almost felt guilty for focusing on his anger experience, and felt myself ‘moving away’. In focusing on the anger experience it seems to grow for him, or he feels I'm seeing him as the ‘whole’ experience in ‘his’ entirety, and he wants to make sure that I don't get that impression.

I gained from what he meant that he knew about how he was and reacted, but that there was some kind of admission here. I really get the sense that this is about him not being painted as something he feels he is, from his description of himself. He doesn't want any confusion. Josh makes sure I know what most people would say - that he's a nice guy but he gets a bee in his bonnet.

Josh finishes here with such a powerful statement. He describes succinctly, where he feels the anger in his body and what the thoughts are. He's just got to get out!

## Table of Themes – *Dean*

Emerging Themes
<p><b>“Don’t know what it was all about.”</b>  <i>The catalyst – how the anger situation started.</i></p> <p><b>“You end up doing what you do.”</b>  <i>His anger – How he manages it / Controls it.</i></p> <p><b>“You feel like this mad adrenaline rush is kicking in.”</b>  <i>His feelings / Body sensations.</i></p> <p><b>“It just creeps up and up and up.”</b>  <i>His voice. His inner noise moving to outer noise.</i></p> <p><b>“It goes round and round and round.”</b>  <i>His thoughts – How he thinks of everything.</i></p> <p><b>“I look scary.”</b>  <i>Image of him as angry, from others descriptions.</i></p>

## Theme Overview – *Dean*

<p><b>1. “Don’t know what it was all about.”</b></p> <p><i>The catalyst – how the anger situation started.</i></p> <p>There feels like an element of justification early on for what’s coming in Dean’s story. Here I get a sense that he knows a little more than he’s letting on, like he understands <i>exactly</i> why his brother had the hump. I get the sense that he understands it all too well! But then he continues with the justification again and can’t understand why his logic cannot be seen. Dean describes the row, yet comes across as it bemusing him, like he just can’t get to grips with how this has happened. There feels a real separation from his part here, like he’s looking at his brother and describing how he, and only he, seems to know why he has the hump so much. Pure logic seems to permeate throughout. How can his brother <i>possibly</i> not understand? This all sounds simple to Dean but I get different undertones when he says it, like he knew trouble would occur but his argument made logical sense so what’s the problem?</p> <p>Dean makes an interesting comment where he describes his involvement from a physical perspective. I get a real physical feel to this description of him buying his father’s TV. The row “kicked off” he describes. This terminology reminds me of the start of a football match. In describing getting angry he ‘did lose it’ but Dean also explains how he doesn’t realize the buildup is happening, or how quick it happens, like it’s an automatic reaction and he was obvious that he would get angry back to this, which he is unfair; his brother unreasonable.</p> <p><b>2. “You end up doing what you do.”</b></p> <p><i>His anger – How he manages it / controls it.</i></p>
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Dean's anger then 'has' to come out. He has to get it out of him. Not on somebody though, but some 'thing'. It's like the process just plays out again, even though it's known. There's a point of no return it feels. If you can get out before this point then you're okay. Having described his anger process and how he leaves to interrupt this, it's interesting that he feels he wouldn't recognize it again. Dean does something to get it out and then feels relief, a release of energy. He describes 'it' as just coming out and then when 'it' has he's able to calm down. Then there's like a kind of pre-reflective awareness that whatever the reason, getting it out worked. Dean gives a fascinating summary of what he's been talking about. There's a line, a 'boundary' and once it is gone beyond I sense almost a kind of disembodiment. There is no conscious ability to control it. You just "end up doing what you do yeah?" which feels like 'period' as opposed to a question. That's what happens. It's no longer a part of his ability to exert conscious control, to think about consequences. Anger after the 'line' almost takes on a life form of its own.

He and his brother had an argument, and this led to him smashing into his door. There's a point here Dean describes not knowing what he's done until he's done it, until after the act. The tenseness leads to him getting more aggressive and then ... It happens (like it's something that happens outside of him ... 'It'), and then he thinks about it and doesn't know why it happened. He knows he can't recognize this happening, afterwards he does though but can't during it building up. It just happens. Again, I get a sense of this 'it', this eruption of anger, being a living thing. He explains again how he doesn't realize the buildup is happening, or how quick it happens. Dean seems to have more control over this process as he describes it now. He has a process to follow or he knows what will happen, so he gets away from the situation (as does his brother; a shared strategy) by driving away.

I wasn't prepared for Dean then describing giving in to the argument and he also follows a justification that he was better off. He describes the strategy playing itself out. Staying out meant staying away - Getting away calmed 'it' down a bit - Then it eventually resolves itself. He wants to separate from his brother, 'not knowing him' seeming to be a form of distancing also. Dean talks about getting out of the anger process. And then I feel a little surprised that he feels relief when his anger has been vented. It's like it just disperses, and up until then I couldn't get a sense of it subsiding.

### **3. "You feel like this mad adrenaline rush is kicking in."**

*His feelings / Body sensations.*

Dean looks at it, the anger experience, in hindsight, and can see a funny side, but in that moment it just kicked off. It's an interesting choice of word he uses to describe the situation however – "nightmare". It doesn't feel like the experience had a 'nightmare' feel to it. The word sounds too strong?

Dean feels the anger in his body everywhere initially. He's able to isolate it to his hands and recognises them getting tighter and maybe other feelings like similar to that. He gets triggered off back into the physical feeling in describing this and goes back to the 'everywhere' statement - "It's like a mad adrenalin rush, all over ... kicking in ..." He then goes back to his hands again though as he recognizes they get tenser. There again seems here a separation, like his *hands* are angry and that means that what *they* touch is done in a more aggressive way.

### **4. "It just creeps up and up and up."**

*His voice. His inner noise moving to outer noise.*

Dean knows when he's feeling angry as his voice changes. He describes hearing his voice change, but also he describes it like somebody else's voicing changing. I get a sense of the separation again

now. He feels his voice change and gives it an interesting description ... 'bubbling up', it 'comes up' and then is stronger and more powerful.

This shows he recognizes his process - he hears his voice, feels it and then he knows he's getting more stressful and it creeps up and up and up. It feels clearer now, like there's a real step by step process.

#### **5. "It goes round and round and round."**

*His thoughts – How he thinks of everything.*

Dean doesn't know what to say when the anger comes upon him as he is just thinking of *everything*. It sounds a really overcrowded and busy process. It continues like this, going round and round until he leaves and gets out of the situation. But leaving doesn't stop the feelings straight away; they begin to subside it seems over around thirty minutes. In describing this he goes back to the moment of getting angry again and how the thoughts keep going round and round and it's this that makes him even angrier! Because it's not going anywhere! It almost feels like a revelation to him and I really get a sense of the process becoming clearer for him.

The thoughts are constant about what's making Dean angry. This is the hard thing. He looks at it from his brother's perspective. But he knows also that they need to leave him alone, just don't talk to him, so he can calm down.

Again, Dean describes this as a "special" experience of anger, but there doesn't seem to be a match to this choice of word. It has the same feel as the use of the word "nightmare". It might be just a figure of speech, but in a sense I get a little misaligned here in the surprising variance in the *quality* of the phenomenon.

#### **6. "I look scary."**

*Image of him as angry, from others descriptions.*

Dean knows people get scared of him when he's angry as they have told him so. Indeed they stay away from him. But then returns his logical argument for being angry, like the two co-exist together. He's scary *and* logical. There seems such a mismatch here.

The only image Dean has is what people tell him, as he has no image of himself. They can see it straight away though, how he looks different - His eyes change, and open up. For Dean it's weird, strange, like he doesn't know what's happening in this process.

### **Table of Themes – Kevin**

#### **Emerging Themes**

**"It's just wrong! Don't do it!"**

*What others do that bring on anger.*

**"A lot of pressure."**

*What he feels in his body.*

**"Just being this big hulk."**

*His changing self.*

**“Smashing things.”**

*Objectifying anger.*

**“You want to get it out.”**

*How he gets the anger out.*

**“No, don’t!”**

*The consequences of anger action.*

## Theme Overview – *Kevin*

### 1. **“It’s just wrong! Don’t do it!”**

*What others do that bring on anger.*

Kevin holds a level of tolerance that reaches its limit when he is being ignored, especially when that is a deliberate act in his relationship. It really gets to him. He appears as calm and I imagine he expects others to treat him the way he treats them. He likes to be understood and make himself clear maybe so he doesn’t get into situations where arguments might arise and the other treats him this way. His principled “It’s just wrong” statement has a feel of standards he likes to keep in his relationships.

### 2. **“A lot of pressure.”**

*What he feels in his body.*

When he becomes angry it builds up within him and he feels it as a pressure. He uses pressure a lot in his narrative. The pressure builds up inside him and he experiences it through his chest, arms and also his head. He experiences his heart racing as though he knows what’s coming next, which for him is a releasing experience. It feels like his heart pushes the energy out of him and during this he also gets tense as his arms and hands prepare to lash out and direct the anger out of him.

### 3. **“Just being this big hulk.”**

*His changing self.*

The hulk emerges in his mind as he considers how he changes. The image really brings a strong sense of the metaphorical shift that begins to happen in his sense of self as he gets angry, and he views/feels himself getting bigger, in line with the hulk metaphor. It’s a scary sight for others to behold.

Following this the noise begins to emerge from him as he starts to shout, getting out the screaming sound in his head. Metaphorically it sounds almost deafening to consider, matched by the violence that comes.

### 4. **“Smashing things.”**

*Objectifying anger.*

As the anger builds up in Kevin he goes into overdrive with his thoughts going round in a circle, until he snaps and loses his temper and ‘snaps’. He describes how graphic this can be, smashing his laptop up. He goes into an angry ‘zone’ and then into sadness and depression which he berates

himself for, calling this stupid. I feel for him in this, as it has a sense that he adds to the difficulty of his feelings by chastising himself even more.

The cycle of smashing things up is a general one he knows well. He does consider however that 'snapping' into anger and losing control quicker is better as it stops him from having to hold on to the anger as its building up inside him.

#### **5. "You want to get it out."**

*How he gets the anger out.*

As he then gets the anger out Kevin then will start to hit things, punching the steering wheel of his car or the ceiling. It seems that it is this process that helps him, even though he may do himself some physical damage, as he describes himself hurting his hand. The process however is useful for him as it regulates his anger and stops him feeling it for what he considers too long.

The process of getting the anger out is an exhausting one, where he then slumps down, unable to be bothered anymore and out of energy, and he relaxes and the anger dissipates, being replaced with sadness.

#### **6. "No, don't!"**

*The consequences of anger action.*

In all of this process of anger building up and Kevin lashing out until he doesn't have any energy to go on, or cannot be bothered, there still remains a part of him, which he calls the 'smart' him that considers the consequences of him losing control of his anger. He is able to judge how much he would lose if he continued with his course of action. This short 'window' has the effect of calming him and his thoughts. He is able to tell himself to stop and will, if the consequences are too much.

### **Table of Themes – Matthew**

#### **Emerging Themes**

**"You get more wound up and you get more wound up ... it isn't hard what I'm asking."**

*The frustration that leads to anger – the trigger.*

**"It isn't worth it ... it isn't really worth it."**

*What arrests his anger.*

**"They are useless ... you could have just done it right and then it would all have been fine."**

*The trigger and his thoughts.*

**"Boiling shaky arms ... lash out or go out."**

*How the body feeling and his managing of his anger.*

**"The most horrible person on the planet ... looking to hurt ... anyone and anything."**

*How he looks to others.*

## Theme Overview – *Matthew*

### 1. “You get more wound up and you get more wound up ... it isn’t hard what I’m asking.”

*The frustration that leads to anger – the trigger.*

Ending up in a court room ... this was the consequence of Matthew getting angry. I wonder what it is that makes him give me the ‘shocker’ first. It’s like he wants me to know it can be REALLY bad, when he gets angry. Then he tells me the story of what precipitated the ‘court anger’, but I feel positioned already. He describes this in an almost matter of fact way. It feels like he describing to me an equation – I got agitated = getting angry = starting to kick her (girlfriends Mums) door in = getting arrested for it = So. Don’t make a big deal of it, I never planned it!

His description of the incident that leads Matthew to court are delivered with such an innocence, but there are undertones of him being antagonised before he arrives. *Antagonistic* even. The anger then doesn’t start in this moment, it has been building up. His “It’s OK for them” comment starts to sound like him asserting the *entire* blame of this situation onto ‘them’. I hear a tone of him feeling sorry for himself.

The moment where the anger starts to build up ‘in the moment’, Matthew again tells this like he has no part to play in his anger. It’s all their fault and he’s just trying to be nice! He describes his annoyance for being treated so unfairly and unreasonably. It’s like he knows he’s winding himself up. The frustration comes across really strongly

I get a strong sense again of a disembodiment, a detachment, like this wound up-ness just happens to him, and that means then that he just finds himself kicking the door when the frustration comes over him. As I sit with him it’s as though he’s talking about himself as another person. I find myself irritated by this in the moment and my reaction is quite quick into the interview. I have a sense in a way as though he’s not here with me, that this “It’s OK for them” way of being separates him from my world (and his?) The “that’s how you end up” at the end seems to support his tone that this seems to just ‘happen’.

### 2. “They are useless ... you could have just done it right and then it would all have been fine.”

*The trigger and his thoughts.*

When Matthew says it’s the little things I relate this to his tolerance levels. He seems to be quite intolerant of little things and he gets angry, or agitated by them. He has more patience for big mistakes.

He shows an example of how a little thing like somebody not doing what he asks them makes him frustrated. He mentions “it’s not hard” again, like he doesn’t understand why people don’t do what he asks, or don’t understand him. Matthew gets so annoyed that he doesn’t even want to deal with them anymore. He’ll do it himself, but then THAT winds him up also. He wants people to do things to his standard or not at all. This irritates him though. ‘Right’ is how he wants things done. If it’s not to his standards then it’s not good enough and he’d rather it not done at all. He reiterates this and it feels like he really wants me to know this. When the jobs not done right it really gets to him.

There seems no moving away from this position either. There feels a real over reaction here. His tolerance seems zero and he wants me to know! It feels a harsh reaction to me, when the other is not doing it right. He doesn’t like that he has to do it himself.



Then comes the “It isn’t worth it ... it isn’t really worth it.” He stopped feeling angry when he got out of the police station. It feels like this added to his anger, his wound up feelings, about being treated so unreasonably, but part of him lets it go. His anger isn’t worth the consequences of the situation. It feels a little out of sync to hear, however, how it really isn’t worth it when it annoys and angers him so much. It doesn’t feel like it fits for me.

### **3. “Boiling shaky arms ... lash out or go out.”**

*How the body feeling and his managing of his anger.*

When Matthew gets really, really boiling, his arms start shaking many times. It reminds me of his previous statements about when the ‘job isn’t done right’ and how he repeats his phenomenological experience often, like contractions, as his lived world is giving birth. He concurs that his arms start shaking, just to make sure I know. I think this is the first time he’s realized that. He’s just realized and wants me with him. It’s like he’s got to get it out. It doesn’t matter if it’s something or somebody that is in the way, but he also calms himself down periodically by thinking that it isn’t worth it.

His arms again keep coming back though; he shakes in the here and now ‘as if’ he knows the feeling. He feels like he’s got to get this pressure out of him.

Matthew’s temper has caused him to lash out in the past, but he goes out for a walk in an attempt to clear his head. It seems for him the only way out of the situation, and takes an hour or so for him to calm down. To calm himself he has to get away. It enables him to think more clearly, to look at things differently, and to start with the problem from a different angle, not getting wound up by it.

This is the process of his anger. He’s said is before. That it gets taken out on something or somebody. The shakes lead to his sense of lashing out as he ‘let’s off’. The inanimate object taking the brunt of his anger with a very interesting description of being redecorated, or the person as the object ‘gets hurt’. They both indicate damage being done, and of that I am under no illusion.

### **4. “The most horrible person on the planet ... looking to hurt ... anyone and anything.”**

*How he looks to others.*

How others see Matthew when he’s angry is that there best off staying away. “He’s intent on hurt so we best just be out of his way.” Matthew’s experienced at this it seems, and the others’ appear to have let him know, so he knows *they* don’t want to be near him. They will ‘get it’ if they become his object by getting in the way. I sense his objectification strongly here as anyone and anything seem to become one and the same – simply the outlet and focus of his anger. His outlet - It’s not important who or what, just the focus of getting it out.

At first I thought there was a lack of description here, but it actually feels very important, poignant. His sense of self or his holding of his self-image appears to disappear in this moment of anger. Matthew can though put himself in the ‘others’ shoes and doesn’t like what he sees. He would not want to go near him either! I become aware at this stage of not feeling like I don’t want to be near him. He talks about this a lot but I don’t feel it, and I just become aware of it.

He describes an interesting analogy of ‘split personality’. Whilst a quasi-diagnosis I can see why he says it *of* himself and why others do too, as he very much seems to switch from being one way, really nice, to a “right horrible asshole”, or what feels like an even more harsh self-judgment – I’m the most horrible person on the planet. I’m also intrigued by his description of being angry as the ‘wrong side’ of him, and I feel I could go of a tangent about the meaning of this. Then I notice I get tangled up in his descriptions as we go through the interview. Wrong, horrible, split, asshole, *so* many negative judgment’s for his experience of anger and himself in it.

**5. “It’s a side of you, you don’t really want to talk about ... you don’t really wanna know.”**

*Talking about anger.*

Matthew feels uncomfortable with describing his anger, but laughs. It’s like he realizes his experience as he describes it for the first time. He isn’t comfortable talking about the subject of anger. He doesn’t ever do it! He has before but it doesn’t make it easier, it’s still awkward, even now. It’s “not one of those things” he wants to talk about. I take his references to “you” as him talking for himself. This “side” of him reappears.

He uses a common description of hiding something away so it doesn’t have to be dealt with. He has had the experience before of talking about his anger, and it seems uncomfortable. In the past, hours of counseling he still thinks about whether he really wants to know how he feels about his anger or not.

It’s interesting that he doesn’t get many answers in looking at his anger, as in the past his counselling has gone looking for where it started and what triggers it off, but he sees it as more of a build-up of stresses he has to deal with and then eventually it just has to come out. It’s an interesting point in that what his counselling has focused on hasn’t really helped. Its more about how his anger feels and how it comes out. This feels like a real plus for the use of phenomenological description as opposed to historical explanation. He says he doesn’t find it helpful yet he’s described so much about his world view. There feels a disconnect here at some level.

## Appendix 9 Table of Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

### - All Participants

THEMES AND ORIGINAL TEXT	LINE
<b>ANGER STIRRING: THE DYNAMIC SENSATIONS</b>	
<b>The Other and the Self</b>	
<b>Ben:</b> Its girls, girls drive me crazy.	8
<b>Mathew:</b> You ask them nicely and then after you asked them nicely a few times you're starting to get wound up ... Inside you just wind yourself up because you think it isn't hard what I'm asking ... So you get more wound up and you get more wound up and then you start kicking the door and then your frustration starts coming out, that's how you end up.	30-40
<b>Josh:</b> So, I think it's just knowing that my point is out there. It makes me feel better. If someone's saying something and I disagree and its sort of an argument I need to get my point across and I need to know in my mind that they understand my point of view. Until they know that, I'm angry. The sooner I've got it out and I know they have taken in what I think then I feel better about it.	86-90
<b>Adrian:</b> I got pissed off by someone just talking to me like an idiot, being rude and I started swearing.	11
<b>Kevin:</b> If someone doesn't listen when I'm trying to tell them something.	124
<b>Dean:</b> He got angry and was raring up and shouting and all that, and that obviously made me angry.	26
<b>The Visceral Sensory Experience of Anger</b>	
<b>Ben:</b> It's like nitrous on a car. You've only got a small tank of it. Your body runs on its normal cylinders but this is like nitrous, like boom.	243-244

<b>Mathew:</b> Starts off with the shakes.	124
<b>Josh:</b> It's like a rush.	178
<b>Adrian:</b> Gale force.	191
<b>Kevin:</b> it's like a sort of pressure in my chest and [ ] your heart rate goes up.	154-155
<b>Dean:</b> Like this mad adrenaline rush is kicking in.	64
<b>ANGER UNFOLDING: THE TRANSFORMATION OF SELF-AWARENESS</b>	
<b>The Changing Metaphorical Self</b>	
<b>Ben:</b> I feel like the Hulk, that's how I feel.	86
<b>Mathew:</b> I'm a right horrible arsehole [ ] I'm the most horrible person on the planet.	150-153
<b>Josh:</b> A really easy going bloke to being a real prick.	257-258
<b>Adrian:</b> I just switch complete personality.	215
<b>Kevin:</b> The incredible hulk.	268
<b>Dean:</b> I look like quite scary.	84
<b>Loss of Control and Responsibility</b>	
<b>Ben:</b> When I get angry right, I just lose it, like a switch, when I'm proper angry [ ] once I lose it, that's me gone.	155-157
<b>Mathew:</b> I know a lot of people who socialise with me, and if I lose my rag then they just think, it's not even worth being near him, because if I've lost my rag, even if it was towards something or someone and they try and stop me they will get it as well. Because at the time as I'm so wound up it don't really matter who it is.	137-141
<b>Josh:</b> It's the feeling of losing control.	106-107
<b>Adrian:</b> All I can do is say, oh sorry [he sounds and acts insincere, smiling]. Cos I don't remember what I've done, and then you get told what you've done and I'm like, Oh really?	154-156

<b>Kevin:</b> Like, 'oh my god' [surprise at his impact on others].	265
<b>Dean:</b> Yeah but my hands get more tense. So if you touch anything it will be more aggressive [Dean, Line 67] ... And your hands something happens like this period of time and then you think, oh no, I've smashed something up?	112-113
<b>ANGER DIRECTED: RE-ESTABLISHING EQUANIMITY</b>	
<b>Getting it out</b>	
<b>Ben:</b> I have to do something, like I know it sounds mad but I nut [head-but] the walls.	82-83
<b>Mathew:</b> Just to relieve the anger out of me I'll take it out on anyone and anything.	141
<b>Josh:</b> I'm not the sort of violent person when I'm angry, but I'll say things, in the heat of the moment, it doesn't matter who's there, or what it's gonna mean after wards, I'll just come out with something and it will be a 10 second brief experience of not having any control of what I say or even what I do, yeah, but to this point it always verbal instead of physical.	12-16
<b>Adrian:</b> I started swearing for like the next 20 seconds at least.	
<b>Kevin:</b> I actually do lash out and like punching the ceiling and just carry on and you don't think stop you just do it and you carry on until [ ] you lose your energy or you can't be bothered.	34 222-224
<b>Dean:</b> If you go past that boundary you need to just do something to get it out of you, so rather than take it out on someone, you take it out on something.	118-119
<b>Getting Away</b>	
<b>Ben:</b> If you can put time between you and the issue you want to sort out, the target, because in my head I'm flying down there and by the time I get there I'm on a normal one.	245-246

<b>Mathew:</b> I go for a walk and clear my head, in about an hour or so I've calmed myself down. I normally come back and I'll be fine. I have to go out to sort of calm myself down.	110-112
<b>Josh:</b> Just walk off, I'm allowed this minute, I'm due this minute.	248
<b>Kevin:</b> It's like it's just gone somewhere else.	215
<b>Dean:</b> Yeah, just getting away from it basically. Just got away and just calmed it all down a bit. And eventually it just resolves itself after a while.	41